

# Sophie's World

Jostein Gaarder

SMARTER **BETTER** *FASTER*

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## CONTEXT

Jostein Gaarder was born in Oslo, Norway, in 1952. His father was a headmaster and his mother was a teacher who also wrote children's books. Gaarder went to the University of Oslo, where he studied Scandinavian languages and theology. In 1974 he married and began to write. In 1981 Gaarder moved to Bergen and began to teach high school philosophy, a career that he continued for eleven years. Gaarder's early writings were contributions to philosophy and theology textbooks and in 1986 he published his first book, *The Diagnosis and Other Stories*. He then wrote two books for children before publishing *The Solitaire Mystery*, which won the 1990 Norwegian Literary Critics' Award and the Ministry of Cultural and Scientific Affairs' Literary Prize. With the publication of *Sophie's World* in 1991, Gaarder gained international fame. *Sophie's World* spent three years as the best selling book in Norway. His first book to be translated into English, *Sophie's World* was also the top-selling book in Germany, France, and Great Britain. It has been published in forty-four languages and in 1995 *Sophie's World* was the best selling book in the world. Gaarder is one of the best-known contemporary Scandinavian writers. *Sophie's World* has spawned a movie, a musical, a board game, and a CD-ROM. Jostein Gaarder lives in Oslo with his wife Siri and their two sons and he now writes full-time.

Gaarder is well known for writing from children's perspectives and most of his books are for a young audience. *Sophie's World*, however, has bridged the gap between audiences of different ages. The hero of the story, Sophie, turns fifteen during the course of the novel. However, the book is subtitled "A Novel About the History of Philosophy," and in it Gaarder tackles 2000 years worth of western philosophical thought. Much of the book's popularity stems from the fact that it takes complicated ideas and presents them in language comprehensible to young adults. It has been used as a textbook in many freshman year introductory surveys to philosophy. Gaarder himself taught high school philosophy for eleven years, so he must have been extremely aware of both the pitfalls and the importance of teaching the subject. His book has received acclaim both as a novel and as a history. Gaarder's manner of treating the philosophers is extremely helpful because often each chapter focuses on a single thinker or a single line of thought. Therefore, the book can be to understand a particular philosopher. At the same time, the plot is intricately woven through the history of philosophy, and so reading the book as a novel is pleasing and gives the reader a solid grounding in the history of western intellectual thought. It is possible that Gaarder wanted to come up with a way of teaching philosophy that would not be very pedagogical. *Sophie's World* has been popular with children and adults alike because it teaches philosophy clearly and in an entertaining manner.

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**PLOT OVERVIEW**

Sophie Amundsen is fourteen years old when the book begins, living in Norway. She begins a strange correspondence course in philosophy. Every day, a letter comes to her mailbox that contains a few questions and then later in the day a package comes with some typed pages describing the ideas of a philosopher who dealt with the issues raised by the questions. Although at first she does not know, later on Sophie learns that Alberto Knox is the name of the philosopher who is teaching her. He sends her packages via his dog Hermes. Alberto first tells Sophie that philosophy is extremely relevant to life and that if we do not question and ponder our very existence we are not really living. Then he proceeds to go through the history of western philosophy. Alberto teaches Sophie about the ancient myths that people had in the days before they tried to come up with natural explanations for the processes in the world. Then she learns about the natural philosophers who were concerned with change. Next Alberto describes Democritus and the theory of indivisible atoms underlying all of nature as well as the concept of fate.

At the same time as she takes the philosophy course, Sophie receives a strange postcard sent to Hilde Møller Knag, care of Sophie. The postcard is from Hilde's father and wishes Hilde happy birthday. Sophie is confused, and moreso when she finds a scarf with Hilde's name on it. She does not know what is happening but she is sure that Hilde and the philosophy course must somehow be connected. She learns about Socrates, who was wise enough to know that he knew nothing. Then Alberto sends her a video that shows him in present day Athens and somehow he seems to go back in time to ancient Athens. She learns about Plato and his world of ideas and then about Aristotle, who critiqued Plato, classified much of the natural world, and founded logic and our theory of concepts.

Then, as Sophie's education continues, the Hilde situation begins to get more complicated. She finds many more postcards to Hilde, and some of them are even dated on June 15, the day of Sophie will turn 15. The problem is that June 15 is still over a month away. She discovers some of this with her best friend Joanna, and one of the postcards tells Hilde that one day she will meet Sophie and also mentions Joanna. Strange things are happening that the girls cannot figure out. Sophie's relationship with her mother becomes somewhat strained as she tries both to cover up the correspondence with Alberto and to practice her philosophical thinking on her mom. Meanwhile, Alberto teaches Sophie about Jesus and the meeting of Indo-European and Semitic culture. She learns about St. Augustine, St. Aquinas, and the christianization of Greek philosophy that occurred in the Middle Ages. By this time, Sophie has met Alberto and he begins hinting that the philosophy is about to get extremely relevant to the strange things that are happening to her.

Sophie learns about the focus on humanity in the Renaissance and the extremes of the Baroque and then Alberto focuses on some key philosophers. Urgently, he teaches her about

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Descartes, who doubted, and by doing so knew at least that he could doubt. They move on to Spinoza as it becomes clear that Hilde's father has some awesome power over them. Then Sophie learns about the empiricists. Locke believed in natural rights and that everything we know is gained from experience. Hume, an important influence on Kant, showed that our actions are guided by feelings and warned against making laws based upon our experiences. But Berkeley is most important to Sophie because he suggested that perhaps our entire lives were inside the mind of God. And Alberto says that their lives are inside the mind of Albert Knag, Hilde's father.

At this point the story switches to Hilde's point of view. On June 15, the day she turns fifteen, Hilde receives a birthday gift from her father entitled *Sophie's World*. She begins to read and is enthralled. We follow the rest of Sophie's story from Hilde's perspective. Hilde becomes certain that Sophie exists, that she is not just a character in a book. Alberto has a plan to escape Albert Knag's mind, and they must finish the philosophy course before that can happen. He teaches Sophie about the Enlightenment and its humane values and about Kant and his unification of empiricist and rationalist thought. Things in Sophie's life have become completely insane but she and Alberto know they must figure out a way to do something. It will have to occur on the night of June 15, when Hilde's father returns home. They learn about the world spirit of Romanticism, Hegel's dialectical view of history, and Kierkegaard's belief that the individual's existence is primary. Meanwhile, Hilde plans a surprise for her father on his return home. They rush through Marx, Darwin, Freud, and Sartre, desperate to come up with a plan to escape even though everything they do is known by Hilde's father. Then at the end of *Sophie's World*, the book that Hilde is reading, while at a party for Sophie on June 15, Alberto and Sophie disappear. Hilde's father comes home and they talk about the book, and Hilde is sure that Sophie exists somewhere. Meanwhile, Sophie and Alberto have a new existence as spirit—they have escaped from Albert Knag's mind but they are invisible to other people and can walk right through them. Sophie wants to try to interfere in the world of Hilde and her father, and at the end of the book she is learning how to do so.

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## CHARACTER LIST

**Sophie Amundsen**—Sophie is the protagonist of *Sophie's World*. She is an inquisitive and spirited fourteen year old who learns just before turning fifteen that her life is the invention of Albert Knag. Sophie learns this and many other things from Alberto Knox, the philosopher who Albert Knag invented as her teacher. Sophie does not just learn from Alberto; she also questions him and shows that she has ideas of her own to implement. By the end of the story Sophie shows that she is a philosopher, because she has the ability to look at things from a different perspective and she can act on what she thinks. Sophie is friendly but not all that social. She is more given to introspection than chatting. In fact, Sophie almost forgets about her one good friend, Joanna, when she starts learning about philosophy. Sophie is critical, and she does not spare those she cares about. Her mother has to listen to much criticism from Sophie throughout the book, and Joanna and Alberto also hear a fair share. Sophie is opinionated and she is interested in saying only what she thinks.

**Alberto Knox**— Sophie's teacher, Alberto Knox represents the ideal philosopher. He is never quick to judge and he always thinks about what he is doing. Alberto believes passionately in philosophy, since it helps him understand that his existence is due to the mind of Albert Knag. Alberto is an excellent teacher because he forces Sophie to think things out on her own and does not make things easy for her but he also cares about her and wants her to learn.

**Hilde Møller Knag**—Hilde is Albert Knag's daughter and Sophie and Alberto are created for her amusement. Like Sophie, she is a deep thinker, and the philosophy in the book intrigues her deeply. Hilde is also extremely compassionate, and she feels for Sophie and Alberto while her father plays with their lives. She is independent, and proves it by giving her father a taste of his own medicine during his return from Lebanon. Hilde thinks things through but also trusts her instincts over her reason sometimes, and her instinct is what tells her that Sophie actually exists.

**Albert Knag**— Hilde's father, Albert Knag is the brains behind Sophie and Alberto's existence. He creates them as a birthday gift for his daughter, whom he loves deeply. Albert Knag has an ironic sense of humor and cares very much about the world. He works for the UN and he wants people to live in peace and harmony. Albert also very much wants his daughter to see the world (and the universe) as the special place that it is. He wants her to learn about philosophy so that she will be able to think and live in the way that he thinks is proper. Like Alberto, he is a philosopher at heart, and the world itself is enough entertainment for him.

**Mother**— Sophie's mother is one of the funnier characters in the book because she provides a foil for Sophie's philosophical adventures. Mrs. Amundsen thinks that her daughter is losing her mind when she starts spouting off about the differences between humans and

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animals and how thinking makes one a human being. Sadly, she also represents those who do not think in the world, a population that, Alberto warns Sophie, includes most of the people.

**Joanna**—Joanna is Sophie's best friend and she is loyal and friendly, although she does not think about things in the same way that Sophie does. But Joanna also will not turn away from philosophy in the same way that Sophie's mother does. So Joanna shows some promise. Perhaps if she had a philosophy course she would progress in the same way that Sophie did.

**Mom**—Hilde's mother is a very minor character in the book. The relationship between Hilde and her father is much more central, but Hilde mother often provides a stabilizing influence in her daughter's life. We do not know how deep of a thinker she is, but it is clear that she loves her husband and her daughter very much.

**Dad**—Sophie's father is hardly mentioned throughout the book. He sends his daughter a postcard early on and it is clear that he cares for her, but his work keeps him away from home for most of the year.

**Hermes**—Hermes is Alberto's dog who works as a messenger, bringing Sophie the lectures on philosophy and later taking her to Alberto. Albert Knag uses Hermes to wish Hilde happy birthday and help ruin the continuity of Sophie's life.

**Jeremy**—Jeremy is the boy who Joanna begins passionately kissing at the end of the garden party. Sophie invites him because she knows that Joanna wants him at the party.

**ANALYSIS OF MAJOR CHARACTERS**

## Sophie

Sophie is the main character in *Sophie's World*. She is the creation of Albert Knag in order to amuse his daughter Hilde. Along with Alberto Knox, Sophie is a part of Hilde's birthday present. Sophie is to turn fifteen on June 15, the same day as Hilde. Sophie is clearly created as somewhat of a counterpart to Hilde, but she and Alberto manage to escape Albert Knag's mind and gain an existence of their own. Throughout the book Sophie learns how to be a philosopher. Early on she ponders the questions that Alberto gives her and has good thoughts about them but she really does not know how to answer them. However, as the lessons continue Sophie's mind becomes extremely acute. She remembers everything that Alberto has taught her because it is all- important to her and she is able to come up with interesting philosophical propositions of her own. Although Alberto knows more about philosophy than Sophie does, she fares better when they enter their new lives as beings of spirit existing within Hilde's world. Perhaps this is because Alberto has trained Sophie and so she has not only picked up what he has tried to teach her but also been critical of him. She was given the best education possible and uses it to the best of her abilities. Sophie figures out that she and Alberto can have an effect on Hilde's world when she dares to think that they can. Alberto disagrees with her, but Sophie has learned from him that the opinions of others should not have the power to dissuade someone from an action they believe in. Sophie is also extremely individualistic. She learns from Alberto but she thinks on her own. She is critical of him, her mother, and her friend Joanna. Sophie acts with conviction and thinks things through before she does them and that makes it difficult to fault her. After all, she is only a fifteen year old girl, and she acts extremely mature for her age.

## Alberto

Alberto Knox is Sophie's philosophy teacher. He is the ideal teacher, and never stops learning. Alberto is dynamic, and he is just as willing to learn from Sophie as she is from him. In the beginning of the book it is most often he who must explain things to her, but by the end they are equals and treat each other that way. Alberto cares about Sophie and orchestrates their escape. He is also extremely pensive and always thinks things through. Many times, Sophie rushes ahead with her thoughts and Alberto points out to her that she has not stopped to consider something. He is a great example of the fact that thinking things through, even if it sometimes takes a while, is preferable to jumping to conclusions. And Alberto is also humble. He is a true philosopher because he does not believe that his knowledge is all that great and so when he makes a mistake he is quite willing to learn from

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it. Throughout the book it is difficult to see much change in his character, but he definitely becomes livelier as Sophie begins to get better at philosophical thinking. That could be because as a philosopher he values the company of one who can teach him above all else. Alberto also has a firm belief in reason, he uses his mind to control situations that he does not have control of. For example, he realizes that if they are simply thoughts in Albert Knag's brain, then perhaps they can utilize Hilde's father's unconscious to help bring about their escape. Even in the face of unbelievable circumstances Alberto holds on to the one thing that makes him human—his ability to think.

## Hilde

Hilde Møller Knag is Albert Knag's daughter. She is the reason that Sophie and Alberto were created in the first place. Hilde bears a strong resemblance to Sophie in that she learns to think philosophically alongside Sophie. She is compassionate, because she feels for Alberto and Sophie, even though they appear to be fictional characters. Hilde believes that Sophie exists somewhere, although she cannot explain how. At age fifteen, she still retains enough belief in the mysterious nature of life and the inexplicable mysteries that surround us to hold a firm belief in something that would be characterized as impossible. But it turns out that, although she does not know it, Hilde is correct—Sophie and Alberto do "exist" in some strange way. Hilde represents that sort of person who can think and reason well but also is willing to believe in what she feels to be true regardless of what anyone else thinks. So, in some ways, Hilde represents that ideal reader for Gaarder's book. *Sophie's World* is designed to be both a novel and a history of philosophy, and someone like Hilde would understand and think about the philosophical ideas that are put forth but would also be partial to the fantastical aspects of the story.

## Albert Knag

Albert Knag is Hilde's father. He has the creative genius to write a book in which his characters become aware of their role as characters in the book. What's more, he carries on direct interaction with those characters even though they are simply figments of his own imagination. Perhaps it was Albert Knag's brilliant construction of Sophie and Alberto that allowed them to gain some sort of an existence for themselves. He created Alberto very much in his own image. Albert Knag is a philosopher first and foremost. His book about philosophy is a gift of love to his daughter because he could not imagine anything better than giving her the same love and wonder for the world that he has. Albert has a great sense of humor that comes out in his interactions with Sophie and Alberto. However, he is also extremely indulgent in his writing. Hilde plays her trick on him to show him what it would be like to be manipulated in the way that he controls Sophie and Alberto. Albert learns from his daughter and realizes that perhaps he went a bit too far in his story, but we can forgive him for that, because his mistakes were for all the right reasons.

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## THEMES, MOTIFS, AND SYMBOLS

## The Pursuit of Philosophy as a Means of Ordering Human Experience

*Sophie's World* is both a novel and a history of philosophy, and so it is not strange that philosophy is its unifying theme. Philosophy is presented not as some esoteric exercise to be performed by people with too much free time but rather as something integral to life itself. Sophie and Alberto need philosophy to understand their world. But they are not so different from the rest of us. They can be sure that their world is the creation of Albert Knag, but just because we lack the answer to the question of where our world (or universe) comes from does not mean that we are freed from asking about it. In fact, as Gaarder stresses throughout the book, to be a philosopher is to never cease asking questions. Alberto tries to get Sophie to realize just how amazing her own existence is. It does not matter that there may be no single answer to the questions that we ask—the very asking of them is what makes us human. Why we are here, what makes a good life, and all of the other philosophical questions posed in the book are, according to Gaarder, the most important things we can ask. Once our physical well-being is taken care of we must concern ourselves with our mental lives. Life is thrust upon us, and the only way that it can mean anything to us personally is if we ask these questions constantly. Philosophy stands alone, outside of other disciplines, because in reality Gaarder equates it with living. If we live without philosophizing, then we have deprived ourselves of the greatest pleasure and understanding that we could ever come to. Philosophy is an ongoing, lifelong pursuit. We alone of all the creatures on earth can engage in philosophical reflection. Although it may not make our lives simpler or give us any easy answers, philosophy will fill us with a sense of wonder about our existence and our existence. Gaarder shows us that even when philosophy is intricately complicated, it revolves around simplicity.

## The Illusory Nature of Free Will

The philosophical issue that plays the largest role in *Sophie's World* is that of free will. Sophie and Alberto learn that their existence is due to the imagination of Albert Knag. Up until that point Sophie had believed that she was an independent, free being. When they discuss the philosophy of Berkeley it becomes clear that in reality their freedom is only what Hilde's father lets them think they have. Yet, despite the fact that they are imaginary, Sophie and Alberto manage to find a way to escape. They cannot obtain what we would consider real existence, but they gain the freedom to act of their own accord. But what of Albert Knag's free will? He wrote a book for his daughter's birthday, and it seems that

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perhaps he was not in complete control of all that he was writing. Furthermore, some of his thoughts seem to have developed the ability to act of their own accord. Although Gaarder does not suggest that all of our actions are determined, it is also not clear the extent to which we may exercise our own free will. Perhaps there is an uncertainty in everything and even our own thoughts are not always what we want them to be. What is clear is that the concept of free will is both extremely important and very complicated to sort out.

## Books

*Sophie's World* is a book within a book, with the implication that perhaps such a regression could continue ad infinitum. Alberto lectures Sophie about philosophy but then we learn that the lectures are really not for Sophie but for Hilde. Yet as readers we realize that the lessons are not in fact for Gaarder's imaginary characters but for us. The very medium of the book is used to help illustrate philosophical points. Although it is quite engrossing, this is not the sort of book that one can read without being conscious of that fact. Many times what people prize in book (as in other forms of entertainment) is the ability to get lost in them. But even getting lost in *Sophie's World* requires knowing precisely that one is lost within the book. Gaarder constantly reminds us that we are reading a book about characters in a book a girl is reading. Besides the humorous irony that comes from such reminders, we are also forced to take the ideas of the novel seriously. Because the ideas that are put forth do not only have import within the book, and that is part of Gaarder's main point. The book itself insists that we must question what we read and attempt to better understand what Sophie and Hilde struggle with so that we can make philosophy personally relevant.

## Dreams

*Sophie's World* contains many dreams, some of which are not easily differentiated from reality. In fact, dreams are used quite effectively to question our sense of reality. Sophie obtains items that belong to Hilde in her dreams. Of course, since Sophie's dreams are orchestrated by Hilde's father, that does not seem strange. However, the fact that Hilde cannot find the items that Sophie comes across suggests that strange things are happening. Hilde dreams that Sophie speaks to her before her father comes home and at the end of the book that is exactly what happens. Alberto also tells Sophie (and therefore Albert tells Hilde) about Freud and theories of dreams as wish fulfillment and links to the unconscious. As a literary device, the dreams in the book provide foreshadowing. However, their role is greater than simply to alert the reader to future occurrences. The dreams themselves bring into question our free will and our possibilities of understanding the world.

## Alberto as teacher

Alberto Knox represents the ideal teacher in *Sophie's World*. He is intelligent and demanding, yet concerned with the understanding of his pupil. Furthermore, what he teaches has great personal relevance and he tries to inspire this same feeling in Sophie. Of course, Alberto and Sophie are actually able to answer part of the question regarding their existence and so philosophy has a more direct import for them. However, Alberto uses Alberto to teach Hilde and he is inspiring to her as well. Alberto also makes Sophie come to many of her own conclusions, rather than thinking for her. Such an interactive method of learning seems critical for philosophy, something that we need to be able to do on our own and all the time.

## Hilde as reader

Hilde reads *Sophie's World* the way we all should. She thinks about everything that Sophie is learning and applies it to her own existence. Hilde does not simply agree with Sophie or Alberto but takes their thoughts and uses them to come up with her own insights. She thinks philosophically and critically. Furthermore, Hilde questions the text itself. She wonders why her father does some of the things that he does. It is important not to be indoctrinated. Descartes decided all of the learning passed down from the Middle Ages was worthless. We must likewise decide what to take from a book and what to disagree with. Gaarder wants us to question above all else and Hilde does this.

## Sophie as student

Sophie takes Alberto's lessons to heart. The difference between her lessons with Alberto and her attitude towards school is marked and telling. School is an attempt to teach us things that will be valuable to us in life, but it is not always successful. There are some things in school that will not be very helpful to us. Sophie is eager to learn but she also can tell what resonates with her and what does not. She understands the relevance of philosophy and after her time with Alberto she is clearly a philosopher of her own accord. But our lifestyles and the societies we live in often take us away from philosophical reasoning, even if as children we are very close to it. Therefore we need to be good learners and students so that we can seize the opportunity to become philosophers should it come our way.

**SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS****The Garden of Eden, The Top Hat, and The Myths****Summary****The Garden of Eden**

After walking home from school with her friend Joanna one day in early May, Sophie Amundsen finds a small letter in her mailbox. It is addressed to her, without a stamp, and it contains only a question—"Who are you?" The letter makes Sophie think. She wonders whether her name matters much, whether her physical appearance makes her who she is. Then Sophie thinks about the fact that contemplating life leads inexorably to thinking of death, and vice versa. She returns to the mailbox and finds another letter, with the question "Where does the world come from?" written inside. Sophie realizes it is a legitimate question and goes to the den, her outdoor hiding place, to ponder. She thinks about the fact that the world is part of the universe, and that that must have come from somewhere. But that means that something must have come from nothing, which she cannot accept. Equally poor is the possibility that the universe has always existed. Even if God created the universe, he himself must have come from somewhere. Then, when Sophie gets the mail, she receives a mysterious postcard. It is from Lebanon, postmarked "UN Battalion", has a Norwegian stamp, and is addressed to Hilde Møller Knag, c/o Sophie Amundsen. The postcard is from Hilde's father, wishing her a happy 15th birthday and telling her he had to send the card through Sophie. Sophie, totally confused, goes through the phone book but does not find Hilde Møller Knag.

**The Top Hat**

Sophie tells no one about the strange letters, and is uninterested in playing with her friend Joanna the next day. After school she rushes home and finds a letter written to her. It contains three pages describing philosophy. The letter suggests that what is most important in life is philosophizing—attempting to understand ourselves and our role in the world. There are not many philosophical questions, but there are many ways to answer each one. Life itself is like a magic trick, and philosophers must always observe it with wonder. After reading the letter, Sophie goes back to the mailbox and finds another one, which stresses the fact that all that is required to be a philosopher is the capacity for wonder. Babies have this capacity,

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but most people become inured to life and no longer find it wonderful. Philosophers are different from others, and the philosopher writing the letters wants Sophie to never lose her sense of wonder. The letters will comprise a philosophy course for her to take. Sophie tries to have a philosophical discussion that night with her mother, but it only leads to her mother wondering if Sophie has begun taking drugs.

## The Myths

A day later, after school, Sophie finds a letter from her dad, working far away, and then another on philosophy. This letter describes the situation leading up to the beginning of western philosophy. Before the Greek philosophers, people explained life through myths—stories about the gods. But the early Greek philosophers questioned the myths and began looking for other explanations for why the world is the way it is. Sophie thinks about this and realizes that making up stories to explain the workings of nature is not so far-fetched, for she would do the same if she did not already have other explanations.

## Analysis

The first questions that Sophie receives make her think about who she is and where the world came from. These questions are easy to ask and almost impossible to answer, but what is most amazing of all is that people stop asking them. Sophie realizes that she has never really thought about these things before, and when she does she understands that nothing could be more important. It seems that knowing who we really are is necessary for our lives to have meaning and import. Beyond that, we live in the world, and are in constant interaction with nature, yet most people take that interaction for granted and do not stop to consider how the world itself came about. As little children we are tremendously inquisitive, and we wonder about everything, but as life goes on we begin to take certain things for granted even though we do not understand them. Sophie is warned not to let this happen to herself, and when she talks with her mother she realizes that most adults not only do not ask themselves these questions, they think doing so is absurd. But Sophie is taking the course seriously, and she ponders everything that she reads. Although she is not sure of exactly who she is or where the world came from, Sophie is aware of the difficulties inherent in attempting to answer such questions and also the importance of asking them. What is most important in life is asking these philosophical questions and most people do not ask them. In fact, a philosopher has more in common with a child than with most adults. Gaarder seems to think that most people live their lives without actually partaking in the most important part of living. It is thinking that is critical, and not just thinking about practical, everyday affairs. We need to think about life itself, to ask why about everything that we normally take for granted.

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Sophie learns that before people started turning to other types of explanations, they made up myths to explain what they could not understand. After reading about this, she thinks that she probably would have done the same thing—when things seem to happen of their own accord it is easy for us to believe that there is some higher power behind their actions. But what is important is to attempt to explain things using our reason rather than making up stories. With our reason we may be able to actually gain an understanding of the world, whereas the myths simply transfer the uncertainty elsewhere. Sophie realizes that the suggestion that God created the world does not really answer anything. Although for some it might solve the issue of where the world came from, Sophie understands that one could simply ask where God came from, and we would be back to the same problem. The philosophical questions are not to be escaped through easy answers but rather to be struggled through, and the implication is that a good life is one that constantly involves battling these issues.

## The Natural Philosophers, Democritus, and Fate

### Summary

#### The Natural Philosophers

Later that afternoon, while Sophie is thinking about philosophy, her mother finds one of the letters. Since it has no stamp, she thinks it is a love letter, and Sophie lets her think that in order to maintain her privacy. Inside it are three more philosophical questions, and Sophie puzzles over them for a day before she receives the next package. The letter tells her that her philosophy course will go from ancient Greece up to the present moment. It also points out that it is very important when assessing each philosopher to understand what his project was—what questions he was attempting to answer. Sophie learns that the ancient Greeks believed the world was eternal, and so they did not ask about where it came from but rather were interested in the question of change. The natural philosophers believed that there was one substance that all things were made of. Some thought it was water, others air, but they were all left with the problem of how changes occurred. Parmenides believed that nothing actually changed, and he held to his reason despite the evidence of his senses, making him the first rationalist. Heraclitus believed in his senses and felt that nothing stayed the same. But Empedocles resolved this problem by suggesting that there were four basic substances and that all changes are the result of intermingling of the four. He also makes a distinction between "substance" and "force", something that scientists still do today. Anaxagoras, from Athens, believed nature was made up of infinitesimal particles but that each one contained

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part of everything. Sophie thinks about all of this and concludes that one cannot learn philosophy; one can only learn how to think like a philosopher.

## Democritus

After reading the last packet, Sophie finds another white envelope in the mailbox. It asks only why the Lego is "the most ingenious toy in the world." She thinks about this question, and the next day receives a packet about Democritus, the Greek philosopher who believed that everything was made up of tiny, invisible, and eternal particles called atoms. She learns that physicists today still believe that there is some smallest particle in the physical world. Sophie is amazed by the fact that Democritus managed to use the philosophers before him to come up with a new theory.

## Fate

Sophie finds another envelope with three new questions on it, and she decides to send a note of her own. She writes a letter to whomever it is who is teaching her philosophy, inviting that person to coffee. She leaves it in the mailbox and then goes upstairs to go to bed. Just before falling asleep, she thinks she sees a man in a beret come to the mailbox, put something in, and take out her letter. Sophie goes and gets the envelope and learns that the ancient Greeks were fatalists—they believed that everything in life was predetermined. However, the historians Herodotus and Thucydides and the doctor Hippocrates began to look for naturalistic explanations for the events that occur in life. The next day is Saturday, and when Sophie wakes up, she finds a scarf with the name Hilde on it.

## Analysis

The debates over the substance that the Greek philosophers believed made up the world are very instructive for Sophie. With Parmenides comes rationalist thought, the concept that what we perceive through our senses may be flawed, but we can trust in our reason. Change was the major problem, and Parmenides' solution—that nothing actually changes—is something that everyone feels sometimes. Although we do not deny the changes that we see occurring all around us, it often seems that things remain the same. Heraclitus, on the other hand, believes that we can only know what we perceive, and since our senses tell us that things are in a constant state of change, they therefore must be changing. The debate of whether to trust our reason or to trust our senses is one that people deal with frequently. It is fairly common for someone to not completely believe what she has seen because it goes against her reason or common sense. Empedocles' conclusion that there are four basic substances is an attempt to rectify the situation, allowing us to believe what we see but also to trust in our reason. It appears that what the philosophers were doing was

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attempting to explain the way the world must be based upon what we can perceive of it, and this is extremely important. Although we could live without thinking about these sorts of questions, the very questions themselves and the answers that we pose to them determine precisely what the very act of living means.

Sophie finds that everything she learns seems to make sense to her, and, moreover, to be extremely applicable to life. Philosophy is not an activity that takes place outside of everyday life; Gaarder says that nothing could be more relevant to the way we live than philosophy. In fact, in a literal sense philosophy has become a regular part of Sophie's life, since the course that she is now taking makes up a major part of her day. Science uses many of the ideas that were developed in ancient Greece, and the fact that Empedocles' distinction between substance and force is still around suggests that perhaps philosophy is really getting at something. Scientific understanding is generally regarded as telling us about the world, and since philosophy has informed our scientific understanding it suggests that what we discover through philosophical thinking may go beyond our relationship with the world to the actual features of the world itself.

The fatalism of the ancient Greeks fits in well with the mythological picture of the world. But when events in the world are no longer described in terms of the actions of gods' but rather given some sort of naturalistic explanation, then it makes sense that the events in people's lives would also cease to be attributed to supernatural causes. To believe that there is a natural explanation for change in the world but not in human life would not be very consistent, and so after taking the first steps away from a mythological worldview, it may be inevitable that fatalistic explanations of people's lives will be questioned. Sophie learns that philosophy builds upon itself, each new philosopher moving from the conclusions of those before him. But, while it changes and moves on, there is no guarantee that philosopher's answers are correct, and the same host of questions must continually be asked.

## Socrates, Athens, and Plato

### Summary

#### Socrates

Sophie goes into her hiding place and finds another letter there. It is a response to her own, and she learns that Alberto Knox is the name of the philosopher who is communicating with her and that he will send his letters via a messenger. He also mentions that she may come across a silk scarf that belongs to someone else and that she should take care of it. Sophie is bewildered because the letter was delivered directly to a secret spot and she cannot

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comprehend the connection between the philosopher and Hilde Møller Knag. She gets the next package, delivered directly to her by a Labrador, Alberto's messenger. The letter in the package tells her the dog's name is Hermes. Sophie learns about skepticism, the belief that we cannot have true knowledge about the world, practiced by the Stoics in Athens. Then she learns of Socrates, who lived in Athens and spent his time conversing with people throughout the city. What we know of him comes from the writings of his pupil, Plato. Socrates would ask questions in an attempt to get people to come to proper philosophical conclusions on their own. He was considered subversive and condemned to die, and, rather than appeal for mercy or flee Socrates drank hemlock and died. Socrates believed in principles that he upheld. He knew that he did not know very much, and this made him much smarter than other people. Socrates had faith in human reason and believed that people were only happy when they acted according to their reason. Therefore, if someone knows what the right thing to do is in a situation she will do it, because it will make her happy. Socrates did not believe that people would deliberately act in a way to make themselves unhappy. Sophie gets into another discussion with her mother after reading the letter, but her mother seems quite unreceptive to these ideas.

## Athens

Sophie receives a videotape that evening and she is amazed to see that it contains Alberto in Athens. He tells her all about the way the city used to be and how Socrates would talk to people who went by, and then, somehow, he takes her back to ancient Athens. Alberto speaks to Socrates and Plato, and then Plato gives her a few questions to think about. Sophie is astounded by the videotape and cannot figure out what is going on.

## Plato

The next day, Sophie thinks about the questions that Plato gave her, and when she receives a letter describing his philosophy, she learns that they are central to his thought. Plato set up a school, called the Academy, and much of his work is preserved. He believed that everything in nature changes, but that there is an eternal world of ideas outside of the natural world. Plato thought that each thing that we see is an approximation of some perfect idea that exists somewhere else. We cannot have true knowledge about things that change, so we cannot actually know the real world, but we can have true knowledge about things that we perceive through our reason. Thus Plato was very fond of mathematics, because it involves solely the use of reason. Plato believed that people were made up of a body that is a part of the natural world but also an immortal soul that is in contact with the world of ideas. When we are born, our soul no longer has the knowledge of that world, but through experience we jog its memory and recollect the true and perfect ideas. Plato suggested a few ways of ordering human civilization, based upon ruling through reason, and he believed that women were just as capable of reasoning as men.

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## Analysis

The philosopher presents Socrates as a man of principle, because he was willing to die for what he believed in. We often consider the true test of someone's belief to be the risk that they will undergo in upholding it. However, what is interesting is that Socrates was killed by his own state. Although he stood for the use of human reason, some people found him so subversive to their own aims that they had him killed. But the murder of a man who simply asked questions demonstrates that Athens, although a center of learning, attempted to control the thoughts of its citizens. Philosophers and intellectuals of the past two thousand years have perceived Socrates as a great and noble thinker, but in his own time, this was not the common perception. If, as Alberto Knox suggests to Sophie, it is the nature of a philosopher to question the thoughts and actions of his contemporaries and to challenge the status quo, then they will always face persecution. Some states will take action against criticism, because many political systems do not allow themselves to be critiqued. Therefore, the philosopher in reality has two roles to play. One of them involves the individual use of reason to look at the great questions that will always be out there. The second role involves interaction with others in order to attempt to get other people to think beyond the routines of their daily lives and contemplate the questions we cannot answer. The second role can be dangerous, because both the government as well as the people themselves may not want to hear what a philosopher has to say. Gaarder seems to be suggesting, through Alberto Knox, that sacrificing one's life for one's principles is the right thing for a philosopher to do.

Plato returns to the idea of change. Socrates was concerned with moral philosophy and human interaction, and Plato attempted to unify a theory of the natural world with one of humanity. Plato was Socrates' pupil, and so clearly much of his work was influenced by Socrates. Alberto teaches Sophie about each philosopher, and he does so in a chronological manner, but she still takes the philosophy of each as a separate entity. Philosophy definitely builds upon itself, but it is important not to forget that each philosopher is an individual thinker capable of coming up with unique ideas. Of course, the pre-Socratics could not have responded to Socrates' ideas, and so one's time period does play a role, but that role is not total. Plato would not have been the great philosopher that he was if he had not been taught by Socrates, but his education did not make his ideas inevitable. The history of philosophy that Sophie learns about is not necessarily an additive history. Thinkers use and respond to the ideas of those before them, but this does not mean they are following some necessary progression in the history of thought.

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## The Major's Cabin and Aristotle

### Summary

#### The Major's Cabin

After reading about Plato, Sophie tries to follow the path that Alberto's dog Hermes had taken into the woods. She comes upon a little lake and sees a red cabin on the other side of it. Without knowing why, Sophie uses the little rowboat at the shore to go over to the cabin. She knocks, and then enters, and inside she sees paintings entitled "Berkeley" and "Bjerkely." By looking around, Sophie figures out that the cabin belongs to Alberto and Hermes. She looks at herself in a mirror and thinks that her image blinks back at her. Then Sophie finds Hilde Møller Knag's wallet inside as well as an envelope with her name on it, which she takes. She runs away when she hears Hermes barking, and she cannot row back across because the boat slid down the bank into the middle of the lake. Sophie reads the questions in the letter, but does not think much about them because she has to explain to her mother what happened without getting her mother too worried. She explains everything away without mentioning Alberto and convinces her mother that she does not have a boyfriend. Her mother tells her the cabin she went to is called the major's cabin. Sophie writes the philosopher a letter, apologizing for her actions, and then thinks about the questions he gave her. Then she talks with her mother, who feels she is growing up very fast and is surprised to learn that Sophie is not excited about her approaching fifteenth birthday.

#### Aristotle

Later that afternoon, Sophie receives a package containing information on Aristotle, plus a small note saying that Alberto is not upset with her but that he will have to move. Aristotle, she learns, was a pupil of Plato's. His project involved studying the changes within nature, and he believed in the use of one's senses. Aristotle believed that Plato's world of ideas did not exist but that the eternal idea was really a concept—the idea of a horse that we have after seeing many of them. Therefore, that eternal idea is in our minds but it comes from the natural world. He did not think there was any reality beyond what we could perceive. Aristotle felt we have innate reason, but not innate ideas. Things have a substance and a form, and the former describes their physical characteristics while the latter describe their limitations or possibilities. Aristotle believed in different types of causality, one of which was "final" cause, the purpose that he assigned to everything in nature. For example, it rains "*because* plants and animals need rainwater in order to grow." He attempted to categorize nature and also founded logic. Aristotle sees man at the top of nature followed by animals and then plants, and God to him is the force that set the stars in motion. He believed

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monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy were good forms of government but warned against the dangers of each. Unlike Plato, he viewed women as "unfinished men." Aristotle's ideas have a great effect on Sophie, and she organizes her room after reading the letter. Then she has another discussion with her mother, who thinks her daughter is growing stranger and stranger.

## Analysis

In a way, Sophie's life has become a mirror of the philosophy that she studies. Her sensory experiences—the postcards sent to Hilde, the mirror that blinked at her—are in direct conflict with what her reason tells her could be possible. The same conflict between what perception and reason that the ancient Greek philosophers struggled with has become apparent within Sophie's life. Everyone faces this sort of conflict, but for Sophie it has become critical. One's image in a mirror blinking is something that reason tells us is completely impossible—you can see someone else blink, but not yourself. Many of the philosophers that Sophie has read about have attempted to resolve the apparent disjunction between the senses and reason, but in Sophie's case it appears that either one or the other must be wrong. If she really did see herself blink, then either reason cannot be trusted or the senses cannot be trusted.

Aristotle provides a good example of the advantage that we have when studying a philosopher who wrote many years ago. His idea of final cause, for example, modern science would completely disagree with. However, in biology we have taxonomies. The forms of government he discusses have all been tried and it is still unclear which is the best form. It is somewhat incredible that his ideas have survived for over two thousand years. There are different degrees to which a philosopher can be wrong. Aristotle's view of women, for example, was wrong, but changing it does not undermine the whole of his philosophy. So in a way we can rectify what we disagree with without disturbing what we still agree with. We may disagree with Plato's world of ideas, but his concept of ordering society through reason can hold up without that other idea.

Sophie's mother represents a practical foil to all that Sophie learns. Although her mother is not very philosophically inclined, she is a good mother who wants her daughter to be happy. Whenever Sophie tries to introduce her mother to some sort of philosophical idea, her mother begins to worry about Sophie. Sophie's mother illustrates the irony that philosophy is something that everyone should be interested in because the questions it addresses apply to everyone, yet many people are uninterested. Sophie's interactions with her mother can be viewed as a metaphor for conversation between a philosopher and one who is not interested in philosophy, for it involves them talking completely past each other.

## Hellenism and The Postcards

### Summary

#### Hellenism

Monday morning on her way to school, Sophie finds another postcard addressed to Hilde. It is from Hilde's father, who wishes her happy birthday again, although he is not sure if it is still her birthday or the morning after. He says he is sure she knows now why the postcards must be sent through Sophie and also promises to reimburse her for the loss of her wallet. It is postmarked Friday June 15, which is also Sophie's birthday and over a month away. Sophie runs back home and finds that the other postcard was also postmarked June 15. She cannot understand what is going on but only knows that something is very wrong. Sophie runs to meet Joanna, who impatiently awaits her. At school there is a test in Religious Knowledge, and Sophie answers all of the questions extremely well using her philosophy knowledge. However, she does not refer to any of the homework assignments in the class, since she had not done them. The teacher tells her she must do her homework in the future but is satisfied with her test.

After school, Sophie gets a package from Alberto on Hellenism, a period of several hundred years after Aristotle when Greek culture spread throughout many areas. As borders broke down between societies, religious beliefs mixed together. Also, people began to feel a sense of decline in the world. Philosophy became concerned with the way in which people can live a good life, and became intertwined with religion. Alberto describes the Cynics, who believed that happiness had nothing to do with material goods. The Stoics, who came after the Cynics, believed that there was a universal natural law that "governed all mankind." They felt that we are all part of the same nature. The Epicureans were less interested in political affairs and felt that pleasure should be sought in life. But any particular act must be considered in terms of the pleasure it will bring compared to what else it will do. Plotinus, most famous of the Neoplatonists, believed that the world is characterized by opposite poles. One pole is light, called the One, or God. The other pole is darkness, but it is defined solely by an absence of light. Some of the light is inside of the human soul, and so we are all a part of the One. Sophie learns about mystics, who believe in personal experiences in which they lose themselves within a supreme being. Sophie has a mystical experience after reading the letter, and she feels she is a part of a greater cosmos.

#### The Postcards

On Wednesday, the day before May 17th, a national holiday in Norway, Joanna convinces Sophie they should go camping. Sophie convinces her friend to go to the major's cabin,

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and inside it they find postcards. All of them are postmarked from Lebanon and addressed to Hilde, care of Alberto. They are all from her father, and the last one tells Hilde to be prepared to meet Sophie, who will probably begin to figure things out. It also mentions Joanna. It is postmarked May 16th. The two girls are very scared, and Sophie takes the mirror back with her. The next morning she finds a new package.

## Analysis

Gaarder suggests that although we learn many things in school, the use of our common sense is not necessarily one of them. Sophie has not done her homework for her Religious Knowledge test, but she managed to answer each of the questions very well using her reason. The philosophy course has taught her that she can think a question through and come up with a good answer to with nothing more than common sense. Furthermore, there is nothing more important to us than the ability to use that reason. Unlike factual knowledge, our reason can be applied to anything. The implication seems to be that learning how to think is much more critical to success than learning any specific set of facts. Sophie is told to do her homework in the future, an important injunction; reason informed by facts will do better than reason alone. For example, it would be very difficult to simply reason out the chemical structure of a compound. On the other hand, knowing the chemical structures for a certain set of compounds is not useful unless they are used reasonably. Sophie feels that she is learning a whole lot more with Alberto than in school, and she may be right, but it is not only how to use reason that Alberto teaches her. Alberto uses factual, historical examples to give Sophie a knowledge base and then she must reason out the philosophies on her own. To memorize what Plato said means little compared to actually thinking about his ideas and coming to an understanding of them.

## Two Cultures and The Middle Ages

### Summary

#### Two Cultures

On Thursday morning, Sophie reads the new letter from Alberto. He explains that he left the postcards to Hilde in the cabin because he thought she would return, and he also refers to June 15th in a way that makes it seem as if it will be a special day. He says they will meet soon. His letter is about Jesus of Nazareth. Alberto starts by explaining that the Greeks and Romans are a part of Indo-European culture, while the Jews belong to Semitic culture. He describes how Indo-European culture (which covers most of Europe) was characterized by a

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belief in many gods—pantheism. Similar ideas popped up in many different Indo-European languages, and were expressed by words that resembled each other greatly. Sight was the most important of the senses for Indo-European culture. The Semites, on the other hand, are characterized by monotheism, the belief in one god. Judaism, Islam, and Christianity are all Semitic religions. But Christianity complicates things, because it spread throughout Indo-European cultures and incorporated many features of those cultures. Sophie learns the historical context leading up to Jesus—the fact that for almost a thousand years before his birth Jews in Israel prophesied a Messiah. Jesus comes as the Messiah, not only to the people of Israel, but for all mankind. He showed that one could not earn salvation but that God is merciful and will forgive all who ask for forgiveness. Sophie learns about Paul, who converted to Christianity and then spread it to many places, including Athens. Alberto tells Sophie he wants her to be aware of her historical roots and Sophie realizes that such knowledge will greatly enrich her.

## The Middle Ages

After a week with nothing else from Alberto, on Friday May 25th, a postcard from Hilde's father lands on her windowpane. It dates from June 15th, and he tells Hilde he hopes it is still her birthday, and that a "week or two for Sophie does not have to mean just as long for us." He also tells her to say hello to Sophie, who, unfortunately, does not yet understand everything that Hilde perhaps does. Soon after, Sophie gets a call from Alberto, who tells her they must meet in person since Hilde's father is getting to close to them. She sleeps over at Joanna's and then goes to meet him from her house. Although she does not understand him, he says Berkeley will be the key figure and that they must get Hilde on their side before her father returns. The next morning, she meets Alberto at a church where he tells her about the ten centuries of the Middle Ages. Although people in the Renaissance called this time the Dark Ages, Alberto points out that universities and schools were established in the Middle Ages. In addition, nation-states became established, with their major cities. There was a period of cultural and population decline, as feudalism set in and bartering once again became the form of payment. But the Pope was set up as head of the Church, and kings began to become very powerful. Greco-Roman culture split up and then came together again in the Renaissance. St. Augustine was a Christian Platonist who brought Plato's philosophy into Christianity. He went out of his way to unite Greek and Jewish thought. His great book was called the *City of God* and he suggested that salvation came only through the Church. St. Thomas Aquinas brought Aristotle into the Christian religion and he tried to show that reason and faith do not come into conflict. She also learns that one of the female philosophers at this time was named Hildegard, who had a vision in which she saw Sophia, the female side of God. This scares Sophie, as does the fact that Albert the Great was Aquinas' teacher.

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## Analysis

Although Alberto's letter to Sophie about Christianity seems to explain the postcards, in a way it only transfers the uncertainty. Many questions remain: how did Alberto know that Sophie would return? And how did a postcard get there postmarked on the day they went to the major's cabin? Neither of these questions are answered, and the mystery of Hilde seems to grow larger. Alberto makes some vague references to something that Sophie does not understand, but it is clear that he knows more than she does and that he is not happy with the situation. We do not know how Alberto has figured out more, and it seems clear that it is Hilde's father who is somehow in control. Gaarder uses an interesting technique to add to the suspense. At the end of the chapter about the postcards things seem to rapidly be spinning out of control. Yet in the first few sentences of the next chapter Alberto takes the responsibility for the postcards. The effect of Alberto's words is to make us think that perhaps everything is not as strange as it appears. But then, a week later, during Sophie's next encounter with Alberto, he reveals that he knows more and that they will inevitably clash with Hilde's father. Furthermore, that encounter will focus on the philosophy of Berkeley, someone Sophie (and therefore the reader) does not even know about. By periodically making it appear as if some of the tension in the plot is not really as critical as it is, Gaarder manages to carry the story at a high level of tension for many chapters without making the reader feel that things have been drawn out too long.

Also, the fact that we know that Alberto is teaching Sophie philosophy in chronological order combined with his certainty that Berkeley is a key figure is a way to make the teaching of the philosophy even more central. We know that Sophie must learn at least all of the way up through Berkeley. But since Sophie learns the philosophy in a manner that makes it accessible to all of us, this ensures that the reader will learn the philosophy and believe it critical to do so. Gaarder has therefore come up with a brilliant solution to the key problem that a novel like *Sophie's World* must face—if it is to be a novel about the history of philosophy then some way must be found to work the philosophy directly into the plot. For the first several chapters it is enough that the philosophy is transmitted to Sophie through mysterious means and by a mysterious person. However, since there is still much more philosophy to come, it is necessary to link the philosophy lessons inextricably to the plot. And the fact that somehow everything that is occurring within Sophie's world may hinge upon the philosopher Berkeley provides that link. We know that Sophie cannot skip ahead to Berkeley because she must get to him with knowledge of the historical and philosophical context behind him. Suddenly it is not only interesting that Sophie receives strange philosophy lessons—it is urgent that she do so.

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## The Renaissance and The Baroque

### Summary

#### The Renaissance

Sophie gets back to Joanna's house and then heads home. Just before taking a nap, she looks into the mirror from the major's cabin and sees Hilde's image behind her own. She dreams that she sees Hilde meet her father and that Hilde's father looks a lot like Alberto. In the dream she finds a gold crucifix and when she wakes up it is under her pillow. The next morning Hermes comes and guides Sophie to Alberto. Just before going inside she finds a postcard addressed to Hilde from her father, postmarked on June 15. He tells his daughter that Sophie is going to the philosopher's house and tells her he is sorry she lost her gold crucifix. She goes into Alberto's house and finds that the postcard angers him, but he tells her the crucifix was just a "cheap trick." Alberto says that Hilde's father has tremendous power.

Then he tells her about the Renaissance. It was a time characterized by a belief in humanity, with a focus on the individual. All cultural life flourished, and Rome was rebuilt. People felt that God was present throughout nature, a belief called pantheism. The idea of an empirical method was born in the Renaissance, and it resulted in an emphasis on investigation and experimentation. The practical value of scientific knowledge became important, and led to scientific innovation that has continued to the present day. The innovations have been both good and bad, but there is no way to return to the days before such inventions. Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo all paved the way for Newton's full description of the physical universe. The heavenly spheres were no longer heavenly and the same law of gravity applied throughout the universe. Earth could no longer be viewed as holding a particularly special place in the universe. People's relationship to God became more personal, and the Protestant Reformation demonstrated that the normal view of the Church was no longer acceptable for all. At the end of his talk Alberto twice calls Sophie Hilde, and he tells her that Hilde's father is putting words into their mouths. She asks if she is Hilde but he avoids her question. Sophie realizes she has no money but then finds ten crowns, exactly the amount she needs to get on the bus. She wonders how it got there, and why.

#### The Baroque

On Tuesday, May 29th, a major in the Norwegian UN Battalion is killed in Lebanon and Sophie thinks it may have been Hilde's father. Her mother tries to find out what is wrong, and they get into an argument that resolves nothing. Then they talk some and they decide

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to have a birthday party for Sophie on Midsummer's Eve. Sophie finally explains to her mother about Alberto and the philosophy course, although she does not mention Hilde. Sophie's mother convinces her to invite Alberto to the party. In school on Thursday Sophie gets handed back an exam that she did very well on, and a postcard falls out of her booklet. Hilde's father tells his daughter that when she reads the card they will have already spoken about the tragic death in Lebanon. He also tells her he is glad that she has lost nothing lately except for ten crowns and that he will try to help her find even that. That afternoon, Hermes comes and takes Sophie back to Alberto's house. At the spot where she found the ten crowns, Sophie finds another postcard. Hilde's father tells his daughter the money she lost likely turned up at that spot and suggests that it may have been found by a girl who needed it. Alberto gets angry over the card and then describes the Baroque, a period of many wars and a concern with the fleeting nature of life. People believed life was like a theater. Philosophy was characterized by conflict between idealism, the belief that existence is spiritual, and materialism, the belief that only material phenomena really exist.

## Analysis

It has become clear that Hilde's father is amazingly powerful, in a way that seems impossible to us. Everything that he has done suggests that he is some sort of a deity. However, the explanation that he is a god does not seem plausible. If that were true, then it seems unlikely that he would bother to torment Sophie and Alberto in such devious ways. Furthermore, Hilde's role is even more difficult to understand. It appears that she and Sophie are in some way connected, just as Alberto and Hilde's father are connected, but the connection remains beyond our reach. Gaarder manages to make Hilde's father's interventions in Sophie's life seem increasingly more improbable while the necessity of some incredible connection becomes more and more certain. The problem is that we cannot possibly reason out the events that have taken place. Yet, since everything is surrounded by philosophy, there is a certainty that there must be some sort of philosophical explanation. The novel stays focused on the key philosophical questions that were introduced at the beginning of the novel—who are you? and where does the world come from?

Sophie and Alberto have covered around two millennia of philosophical thought, but they have never come upon a satisfactory answer to the major questions. Thus Alberto and Sophie study each new philosopher with similar questions and mind, and the reader in turn is forced to look at each one without taking anything for granted. Philosophy then is not necessarily viewed as progressive, as science often is, but rather as a continual attempt to offer answers to questions that have always troubled humanity. In fact, Gaarder has found a way to place a clear distinction between philosophy and science. We generally trace the roots of Western science back to ancient Greek thought and tend to view things as adding up cumulatively from then. Not much advance occurred during the Middle Ages and then with the Renaissance and the empirical method science really took off. But Gaarder seems

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to suggest that philosophy, although in the west it starts from the same roots, asks questions that science cannot answer. Some philosophical questions have been answered by science, but it is possible that there are some that science will not be able to touch, and these are the questions that the book is most concerned with. Although philosophy has progressed, in the sense that each new philosopher has taken into account the arguments of the preceding ones, the same questions persist throughout the history of philosophy. Philosophy is a continual task for humanity. It is the asking of questions that may not be answerable in an attempt to better understand our existence. And the literal importance that it has for Sophie and Alberto can be taken as a metaphor for just how critical it is for everyone.

## Descartes, Spinoza, and Locke

### Summary

#### Descartes

Alberto continues talking to Sophie, and he describes the life of Descartes. Descartes decided, much like Socrates, that he did not know very much. He doubted the many philosophical works that had been handed through the Middle Ages and he set out to build his own philosophical system. Descartes was the first philosopher in a long time to attempt to bring all knowledge into a coherent philosophy. His concerns were with certain knowledge—that which we can know for sure—and the mind/body relationship. Because philosophers believed in a mechanistic view of nature, it was critical to figure out how the mind's thoughts became translated into actions of the body. Descartes doubted everything that was not certain and then realized that the very fact of his doubting meant he must be thinking. From there, he decided that the existence of God is also certain, and went on to define the world in terms of thought and matter, which he called extension. The mind and body interact, but the goal is to get the mind to operate solely according to reason. Alberto shows Sophie an artificial intelligence program and Sophie has a conversation with it. Major Albert Knag, Hilde's father, sneaks onto the hard drive and talks to them briefly through the computer.

#### Spinoza

Alberto then begins to tell Sophie about Spinoza. Heavily influenced by Descartes, Spinoza was the first to suggest that the Bible be read critically. He was persecuted for his beliefs, and his own family even deserted him. Spinoza viewed the world itself as a part of God. He rejected Descartes's dualism and believed that thought and extension are simply two of God's features that we can perceive. He had a deterministic view of the world, believing that God

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controlled all through natural laws. Spinoza felt that only God was truly free but that people could attain happiness through seeing things "from the perspective of eternity." Sophie goes to eat a banana but finds a message from Hilde's father on the peel. They determine that he is clever and powerful and Sophie suggests that perhaps he may be orchestrating all that they say. Alberto tells her not to jump to conclusions, and then he calls her Hilde as she leaves.

## Locke

Sophie tells her mother a little bit about the situation with Alberto and Hilde's father, but only succeeds in making her mother worry more than ever. Two weeks go by and Sophie hears nothing from Alberto. She receives two birthday cards for Hilde. On June 14th Hermes comes to get her, and before taking her to Alberto's house he says happy birthday to Hilde. Sophie is amazed, but it seems Hilde's father can do anything. Alberto tells her about the empiricists, philosophers who felt that everything in our mind comes from our experience through the senses. They were critics of the rationalists. Locke, Berkeley, and Hume are the most important, and Alberto starts by discussing Locke. He wanted to understand where our ideas come from and how trustworthy our senses are. Locke felt we could perceive simple sensations, and that we build these up through reflection to form complex ideas. However, he also divided the world into primary and secondary qualities, and only the first—such as size or number—are accurately reproduced. Secondary qualities, like taste, vary from person to person. Locke had a few rationalistic features to his thought. He felt that the same natural rights applied to everyone and also that the existence of God was knowable through reason. Locke also advocated a division of power within government.

## Analysis

As Alberto teaches Sophie about each philosopher, Hilde's father does something that directly contradicts that philosopher's ideas. After learning about Descartes, who felt that the mind, and reason, was sacred, Albert Knag sneaks onto the hard drive of the computer and has a conversation with her. His action seems to be a blatant insult to reason, which suggests that it is impossible for someone to just sneak onto a computer's hard drive like that. While learning about Spinoza, Sophie finds a message from Hilde's father on the inside of a banana peel. Spinoza believed that God controlled the world through natural laws, and yet Hilde's father appears to play with those laws. Finally, Hermes, a dog, speaks to Sophie just before she learns about Locke and the empiricists. Yet these actions are not necessarily contradictory to the philosophy that Sophie has learned.

Part of what makes Gaarder's juxtaposition of the great philosopher's ideas with Sophie's life so powerful is the fact that their philosophies can also be made to fit with her

circumstances. Although Albert Knag talking to Sophie through the computer seems ludicrous, perhaps there is a reasonable explanation. If there were such an explanation, then Descartes would probably be satisfied. For Descartes, it is not something that seems like a violation of physical reality that is a great problem, but rather something that violates reason. Descartes doubted everything in the beginning, and all that he was really sure of at first was the fact that he could doubt. Therefore, as long as whatever is happening to Sophie does not touch the fact that people have reason, it does not contradict Descartes' philosophy. Spinoza, on the other hand, was a determinist who felt that people were not truly free. Albert Knag's message on the inside of a banana peel is difficult to explain, yet who can say that we understand all of the natural laws. Spinoza was certain that the universe was rational, but there is no assurance that our reason can comprehend all. Therefore, what appears irrational to us may simply be the complex workings of the rational laws of nature. Finally, Locke, although he was an empiricist, did not believe in simply trusting everything that we perceive through our senses. Rather, he felt that only certain qualities could be perceived objectively. When Sophie heard Hermes wish Hilde happy birthday it is possible that her senses were deceiving her.

Gaarder forces us to consider more deeply the implications of the philosophy that Sophie learns. Taking into account these apparent contradictions and working them through to a resolution gives the reader both a greater understanding of the philosophies involved and also demonstrates the importance of the philosophers. Gaarder seems to be showing us that philosophy is a part of everyday life, and that the philosophers of the past will always be relevant to the present. Though it is by no means simple to grasp the importance of Descartes or Spinoza, it can be very fruitful to do so. Reading *Sophie's World* is supposed to make us think, and it can help us to grapple with what Gaarder believes are some of the most important questions that can be asked.

## Hume, Berkeley, and Bjerkely

### Summary

#### Hume

Although Sophie wants to hear about Berkeley, Alberto decides to discuss Hume first. He was the greatest of the empiricists and had a tremendous influence on Kant, a later philosopher. Hume was concerned with cleaning up our thoughts. He believed that perception was made up of "impressions" and "ideas". Impressions are how we experience the world, and ideas are what we recall of our impressions. Both ideas and impressions can be simple or complex, but complex ideas can be made through our imagination—an angel is one

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example. He wanted to examine our complex ideas in order to throw out everything that did not stem directly from impressions. He pointed out that we have no unchanging ego, since what we perceive as ourselves is in reality a huge number of perceptions that change rapidly. The Buddha also believed this, and both he and Hume opposed the idea of an eternal soul. Hume was an agnostic—he felt the question of God’s existence was beyond human reason. Hume believed that what we cannot know for sure that what we call laws of nature are unbreakable. Just because every time we have seen a stone dropped it has fallen to the ground does not mean that it has to do so. We simply expect it to fall. We impose our idea of cause and effect on the world. We perceive a billiard ball hitting another and decide that the first causes the movement of the second. In reality, all we have seen is that the second moves after the first and we ascribe causality to what we have seen occur again and again. Hume also pointed out that we act in accord with our feelings, not our reason. He warned against concluding that what is is what ought to be.

## Berkeley

A plane flies by, trailing a banner wishing Hilde a happy birthday. As black clouds appear, Alberto begins to discuss Berkeley. Berkeley questioned even more than the other empiricists. He suggested that even external reality itself may have no substance. Berkeley felt that all of our feelings and ideas can stem from our souls—just like when we are dreaming. But he also thought that all of external reality could come from another spirit. Berkeley believed that we exist only in God’s mind. And Alberto thinks that they exist only in Albert Knag’s mind. That is the explanation for everything that has been happening to them. He thinks that Hilde’s father is writing or telling their story for his daughter’s amusement. Alberto calls Sophie Hilde a few more times and then lightning flashes and Sophie runs out of the house.

## Bjerkely

Hilde Møller Knag wakes up on Friday June fifteen, excited for her birthday and eager for her father to return in a week’s time. She looks outside and thinks of the time she fell overboard in the rowboat and the boat had been left floating in the middle of the bay. Hilde looks at her reflection and remembers how she used to try to wink at it with both eyes because her father said it was possible in this magic mirror. She sees a large package by her bed and grows agitated because it might be the strange present she expects from her father. Hilde opens the package and finds a ring binder filled with typed pages. The title is *Sophie’s World*. She begins reading it. The book tells Sophie’s story, and Hilde rapidly moves through the chapters. She realizes that Sophie must have been very confused by the birthday cards that were sent from her father. Hilde also wonders about her silk scarf that Sophie found—she knows it must actually be someone, not just in the book. Her mother comes in to wish her happy birthday and has a difficult time getting Hilde to look away from

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the book. Hilde finds the story enthralling, but also begins to get annoyed with her father for confusing Sophie, Alberto, and Joanna so much. When Sophie finds her gold crucifix Hilde becomes very confused, because she does not know how her father could have known it was lost. She becomes certain that Sophie actually exists.

## Analysis

Gaarder connects the idea that Sophie is a part of Albert Knag's imagination to Berkeley's philosophy. We know all along that Sophie is a character in a book, because we can read that book. Sophie's life does not continue unless we decide to read more of the book. As a result, it is impossible to ignore the possibility that the same could be true of our own lives. Although it seems improbable that we exist only in one person's imagination, we cannot know for sure. It can be fun and interesting to think of the possibility that life itself can be a dream or an active construction in someone else's mind, but Gaarder does not say how that thought affects the way we live.

*Sophie's World* presents us with the possibility that our existence may not really be what we believe it to be. To fully understand our existence, we can rely on the philosophers Sophie has studied. As long as what happened to Sophie does not happen to us, we can go on believing that we are not the figments of someone else's imagination. While we cannot know for sure either way, perhaps Gaarder is pointing out that it is better not to know. If we knew, like Sophie does, that our entire lives were created by some other mind and that we did not actually exist, it would be a somewhat depressing realization. On the other hand, the fact that we cannot know leads us to look at our lives in a different way. Berkeley points out that we cannot be sure even of the world. In a way, such an uncertainty only makes life itself seem more magical.

Regardless of what we conclude about our actual existence, what we learn from Hume is still critical. Hume helps us understand how much of what we think we understand about the world may be due our habit of seeing things happen the same way. We must always be receptive to new occurrences. It is not a coincidence that the chapter about Hume occurs right before Sophie discovers that she is a part of Albert Knag's mind. Hume prepares both her and us for this shock by insisting that we have a limited knowledge of the world and that just because we have seen something happen many times does not mean we can count on it happening again. In the same manner, just because we have never seen something occur does not mean it cannot occur. Hume teaches us the danger of imposing our minds on the world.

## The Enlightenment and Kant

### Summary

#### The Enlightenment

Hilde skips school to read Sophie's story, and she gets through the chapter on Berkeley. She finds herself agreeing with Alberto that her father has gone too far and then wonders whom she really agrees with, since her father wrote what Alberto said. Hilde thinks that she sees her reflection wink with both eyes. She finds out that her mom found her gold crucifix, and mentioned that fact to her father. However, when she asks for it, her mother cannot find it. Then she reads on in *Sophie's World*. Sophie wakes up on the morning of her birthday and convinces her mother that she is all right. Then she receives a call from Alberto, who has a plan. He thinks that they may somehow be able to influence what happens to them, because Hilde's father may not know what he is going to write until the moment that he writes it. He wants to figure out a way to somehow escape, but they cannot get away until Sophie has finished her course in philosophy. Hilde thinks that Alberto may have a point, because she knows her father will be writing quickly and that he might write something without realizing it. After school, on her way to meet Alberto at the major's cabin, Sophie gets a postcard from Hilde's father wishing her happy birthday. She also receives a postcard for Hilde that describes what Alberto will talk about in his next lecture and tells Hilde not to stay up too late reading.

Alberto describes the Enlightenment. Sophie and Hilde learn that the French Enlightenment was characterized by much "opposition to authority", politically as well as philosophically. The French thinkers had tremendous faith in reason. They wanted the masses to learn—to be enlightened—and they believed that this would result in great strides for humanity. They felt that we must return to a better, more natural way of living. They also wanted a natural religion, one that would be the same for all people. Finally, they felt that people had fundamental natural rights and they fought to see those rights upheld. Then a sea serpent appears in the lake and they go inside the cabin. Sophie finds a note for her and Hilde where the major points out that the UN is founded on principles from the Enlightenment. Hilde stops reading and goes downstairs to eat with her mother.

#### Kant

Hilde's father calls late that night to wish her a happy birthday, and she tells him she is very happy with his gift and that she thinks that Sophie and Alberto are real. Then she starts to read again. Alberto talks about Kant, who worked from the views of the

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empiricists and the rationalists. He believed that certain factors in our mind influence our experience of the world. We perceive everything as occurring in time and space, and these are innate characteristics of the human mind. Kant divides the world into things as they are in themselves and as we perceive them. We cannot know things as they are in themselves, but we can know how we perceive them. He felt that the law of causality was also a part of the human mind. Kant felt that we cannot know the answers to certain questions because they lie beyond human reason. He believed that these questions are answerable only through faith. Alberto is interrupted when Little Red Ridinghood knocks at the door and delivers another note from Hilde's father. Kant also believed that everyone has innate moral reason, and that moral actions are ones we perform out of a sense of duty. When we do so, we are free, because we are following our reason, which is a part of the world as it is in itself. Alberto also says that that Albert Knag cannot contradict reason, and that is their only weapon against him. Then Sophie leaves and meets Winnie-the-Pooh in the woods, who gives her a letter to Hilde that describes Kant's import for the UN.

## Analysis

When Hilde begins agreeing with Alberto that her father has gone too far, we are presented with a true paradox. Clearly, Alberto is a character in a book that Hilde's father has written. So agreeing with Alberto means agreeing with her father. But at the same time, Hilde's father is himself a character in that book, and his actions in the book are sometimes disagreeable to Hilde. Even Hilde cannot figure out what is really going on. However, she does know that more is happening than even her father understands. The gold crucifix and the scarf that Sophie found seem to have disappeared from Hilde's world, and this suggests that maybe Albert Knag has created more than he bargained for. He has really orchestrated the lessons that Alberto has given to Sophie and they are intended in his mind for Hilde, but the same lessons must be applied to his life as well. He created Sophie and Alberto's universe in his mind. But if it is true that Sophie cannot always trust herself or her mind, and that she is not always the same person from day to day, then it is also true of Albert Knag. Perhaps the point that Gaarder is making is that complete control is out of our reach. We cannot completely understand the world and, since our own minds are a part of that world, we therefore cannot entirely know our own mind. So Hilde's father, although he is the one writing about Alberto and Sophie, may not know exactly what he has done with them. Furthermore, the possibility, which Hilde is certain of, that Sophie and Alberto actually exist outside of the book, is one that cannot be ruled out.

We cannot rule out the possibility that Sophie and Alberto exist outside the book because we cannot know for sure that the characters do not exist somewhere else. After going through approximately 2000 years of philosophy, we have returned to one of its earliest truths—the only thing we can really know is that we know nothing. Socrates supposedly first stated this and Descartes said a similar thing centuries later. Now Gaarder may be using this statement

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to point out just how little we really do know. All of our lives may be inside a book that someone has written. The external world that we think we see may not actually have any physical substance. Perhaps there are other realities existing besides our own that we have no knowledge of. All we can really know is what both Descartes and Socrates knew—that we can question. Gaarder shows us that not only is it good for us to be philosophers, in a certain sense it is all we can ever hope to be. For certain knowledge can only be had, as Kant demonstrated, of what we perceive. And our perceptions need not tell us anything about the way things are in themselves. So, in a sense, flawed and prefigured as it is, our reason really is all that we have.

## Romanticism and Hegel

### Summary

#### Romanticism

Hilde wakes up the next morning, eats, and begins to read. Sophie returns home and learns that her mother has invited Joanna and her parents over. Joanna and Sophie create an invitation to her birthday party, which is to be a "philosophical garden party." Joanna's parents decide it looks interesting and ask to come. On Tuesday, Alberto calls and tells Sophie he has been working on their plan. It is easier to work when Albert Knag is focused on Sophie, he says. He points out that her party is scheduled for the same day that Hilde's father is supposed to return from Lebanon. Later that afternoon they meet and Alberto talks about Romanticism, which centered in Germany. The Romantic period was characterized by a worship of the individual and freedom. Romantics felt that art was humanity's greatest expression of freedom. One of the Romantics he described was engaged to a girl named Sophie who died four days after her 15th birthday, something that scares Sophie. The Romantics saw nature as a world spirit, and this was the view of Schelling, the greatest philosopher of the time. After Universal Romanticism, this earlier phase of Romanticism, came National Romanticism, which was concerned with history, language, and culture of the people. Fairy tales and folk songs became important. Writers would write without knowledge of all that they wrote and then at a certain moment directly intervene and retake control of their own story.

Suddenly Albert Knag begins having Alberto call for a new section and tell Sophie that she should not worry about dying because there are clearly several chapters left in their story. Aladdin, who has a message from Albert Knag in his lamp, visits them. Alberto says that they are inside Hilde's father's mind and that he is working hard on their story so he cannot sleep. Then he tells Sophie that he was not really speaking but that Albert Knag

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directly dictated the words. Now they are sure that they exist in a book written by Hilde's father. Alberto calls upon Hilde to rebel against her father. Then he points out that Hilde and her father could be inside of someone else's mind, someone who is writing a book about Hilde's father writing a book. Sophie points out that even that author could be in the mind of someone else, and Alberto says that he must have had them discuss that option because the book is really a textbook on philosophy.

## Hegel

Hilde decides she will teach her father a lesson, and then she reads on. Hegel, Sophie learns, believed the world spirit was just the sum of human interactions. He thought truth was subjective and that human reason changed each generation. Thoughts must be judged in their context, and right and wrong change accordingly. But human knowledge is always increasing through history, so history is progressive. He also believed that thinking evolves dialectically—one thought leads to its opposite and then we combine the two thoughts to form a new idea that contains the best elements of both. Hegel also believed in the community over the individual and felt that language forms people, rather than vice versa. The world spirit realizes itself in three increasing stages—in the individual it is the subjective spirit, in the community the objective spirit, and in art, religion, and philosophy it is the absolute spirit. Philosophy is the greatest form of knowledge because it involves the world spirit reflecting on itself.

## Analysis

The philosophy lessons and the plotline of the novel have become so intertwined that at this point it is difficult to separate them. Gaarder illustrates the philosophy of the Romantic period and of Hegel by using examples of what is described. Alberto tells Sophie that Romantic authors often felt that their books were writing themselves but that at certain moments they would blatantly exert their own power as authors. Immediately afterward, Gaarder begins doing the same, on several levels. We feel that Albert Knag is showing off his power by making Alberto say certain things and also causing section breaks to appear, but we are also made aware that Gaarder is behind everything. The fact that the author sometimes loses control of the work is interesting on two levels. On the one hand, it suggests that somehow Sophie and Alberto may really be able to do something that Albert Knag is not completely aware of. But that fact really suggests that authors sometimes feel as if books write themselves. When we write, we are all aware that often the words that come out seem very different from the thoughts we were trying to express. Sometimes authors state that their characters take on a life of their own. The author's mind has complete control over the characters, but perhaps the author does not always have complete control over his mind. In fact, this is not just true about written work.

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It also happens that when we speak we are often unsure about what we are going to say until after we have said it. If what we say or write comes from our minds then this simply means that we are not conscious of all that is going on inside our minds. But this is very important, and Gaarder makes us keenly aware of this fact. It is likely that when writing this book he had a general idea of what he was going to write but much of it must have been written spontaneously. We edit our writing to attempt to make clearer what we mean, but it is possible that some thoughts are not even communicable. That is, perhaps some of the things that we think of cannot be spoken or written down without losing something critical. Given that communication works so well in general, it is unlikely that many things are incommunicable, but it is possible. The part where Sophie suggests that even the author of Albert's book could be a character in another book is important not because it snuck into Gaarder's writing but because it was deliberate. Furthermore, Gaarder shows us how much a book is an interaction between author and reader. We can find amusing the fact that the characters in the book are aware of that interaction, but still the interaction itself is important. We should always be aware of the fact that even *Sophie's World*, instructive as it is, is just a book written by an author who may be a character in someone else's book. Gaarder forces us to question everything and we cannot assume that anything is certain.

## Kierkegaard and Marx

### Summary

#### Kierkegaard

Hilde goes downstairs to eat lunch with her mom. She has decided to play a trick on her father and finds out when he lands in Copenhagen. Hilde is careful not to make her mother suspicious and then explains that she must get back to reading. Alberto is ready to tell Sophie about the next philosopher when Alice in Wonderland knocks on the door and gives Sophie two potions to drink. She drinks from them, and the first makes her feel as if everything were one. Alberto explains that it is Idealism, or the Romantics' world spirit. The other bottle makes each object appear to be a world unto itself. It is therefore individualism, according to Alberto, and both views are right.

Kierkegaard felt that Hegel and the Romantics had moved away from a person's responsibility for their own life. He was angered by people's ambivalence about religion. Kierkegaard felt Christianity could either be believed in or not, and that the two options are exclusive. He founded existentialism, the philosophy that is concerned with the existence of each individual. He felt objective truths were useless and that each person could only attempt to discern what is true for himself. Reason is not that important, since we worry

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about things that it cannot decide. Kierkegaard was a nonconformist and argued against the conformity in society. He believed life consists of an aesthetic stage, an ethical stage, and a religious stage, and we must decide to move between them. Existentialism flourished after Kierkegaard.

## Marx

Hilde calls some friends of their family to enlist help in her plan. Then, after going out with her mother, she reads on. Sophie returns home and tells her mother she met the philosopher again. Her mother tells her there is a letter for her from the UN Battalion, and Sophie manages to stop her mom from worrying. The letter contains two lines of poetry that Sophie does not understand. On Thursday, June 21 Alberto calls and tells Sophie he has almost figured out a way to get them out. She asks about it but he points out that it must happen behind the scenes because Albert Knag is aware of every printed word. On her way to meet Alberto, Sophie encounters Ebenezer Scrooge and the little match girl from a Hans Christian Anderson tale.

Marx, Alberto tells Sophie, was a historical materialist. He wanted philosophy to be practical. Marx believed that economic forces caused change in society. He defined society in terms of material bases and a superstructure of culture. The bases support the superstructure, but there is an interaction between the two, and so Marx is considered a dialectical materialist. He pointed out that the natural resources of a society determine what the society will produce and what type of society it will be. Those who have control of the means of production determine societal norms, and this is usually the ruling class. Marx felt there was always conflict between two classes in society and in his day it was between capitalists and workers. Change, he felt, was only possible through a revolution, and it was necessary because the workers were not laboring for themselves—they were exploited by the capitalists. Soon Alberto calls for a new chapter.

## Analysis

Gaarder uses the two bottles that Alice in Wonderland gives to Sophie to show us that there is no simple way to see the world. One of them causes Sophie to look at the world holistically, as if everything were interrelated. The other bottle causes her to see each individual entity as a world of its own. Alberto tells Sophie that both views are correct. We could very easily view the world from a single perspective, but this would result in missing much of what can be seen from a different way of looking at things. Kierkegaard rejected the world spirit of the Romantics and Hegel and wanted the focus to return to the individual. It is important to continue to view things from the point of view of the person. However, there is something to the holistic way that the Romantics viewed the world. We do live in communities as Hegel believed, and so perhaps seeing things from a perspective bigger than one's own can

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also be helpful. The point is not to try to find the best way to look at the world but rather that it is important to continually look at it in a new way. Alberto has told Sophie this same thing in many different ways throughout the book, and the potions make it clear that there is something to be gained from each of those two different vantage points.

In fact, based on Alberto's lectures one could say that the goal of philosophy is to find a new way of looking at a certain situation in order to provide a new insight. There are likely an infinite number of ways that we could look at things, and it is critical that we keep in mind the fact that any one viewpoint is necessarily limited. Because of this fact, it is also inevitable that there will be just criticisms of any philosopher. Every philosopher will seem correct as far as some of his conclusions go, but his viewpoint can always be brought into question. Therefore, asking questions is most important, because when we ask ourselves a question that can have no single answer perhaps it forces us to consider things from a different perspective. And when we look at things in a new way we are keeping our minds open. No one person can see things from all perspectives, and a philosopher has to take a stance at some point, but it is important to keep in mind the perspectives that have come before you. Kant, for example, combined the rationalist and the empiricist viewpoints into a single system. So he was able to take a look at two different views and come up with his own based upon them. Marx, however, felt that Kant's sort of philosophy came from the wrong perspective because it did not provide any practical advice. He represents yet another way of viewing things. Gaarder wants us to be aware of as much as possible but above all to keep an open mind so that we are always receptive to a fresh perspective.

## Darwin and Freud

### Summary

#### Darwin

Hilde wakes up Sunday morning and begins reading. After a brief interruption from Noah, who gives Sophie a picture of the animals he saved, Alberto continues talking about the naturalistic trend that included Darwin, Freud, and Marx. Darwin became well known as a natural scientist while in college, but it was his time aboard the *HMS Beagle* that was to change science forever. Darwin's major ideas were that all plants and animals had evolved from earlier forms and that this process occurs through natural selection. He used several arguments in favor of biological evolution, and it was a controversial topic, since it contradicted the Creation story in the Bible. Darwin considered the artificial selection that humans impose on domestic animals and came up with the idea that nature does the same thing. Animals that are best suited to their habitat will survive. However, this does

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not mean that those who survive are better, since they are better suited only to a particular environment. Any change in that environment might result in different features favored by nature and other animals surviving. Man now had to be viewed as descending from animals, something that involved a large change in people's worldview. Alberto describes life as a lottery and says that we can only see the winning combinations. All of the species alive are those that survived, and we do not see the extinct ones. Alberto also points out that no one really knows how life started. Darwin guessed that maybe some primordial soup of elements somehow spontaneously transformed into the first living cell. Scientists of today have more information but still think along similar lines. We have become aware of the process that created us. Alberto states that evolution has led to more and more complicated forms of life and suggests that this may not be accidental. We are all a part of the system of evolution.

## Freud

Hilde loves the book, but she is unable to believe that Sophie and Alberto are nothing more than inventions in her father's mind. But she thinks her plan will give him a taste of his own medicine. Then she starts reading again. Alberto tells Sophie about Freud. Freud pointed out that we have unconscious drives that can affect our actions without us knowing about them. His psychoanalysis involved studying the human mind in order to help people deal with neuroses or other sorts of problems. Freud found that people had often repressed certain events in their life—buried them deep in their unconscious—and that these events were the cause of their malaise. Freud felt that our minds are made up of three parts. The id is our desire for pleasure. The ego takes reality into account and regulates the id. And the superego is the societal morality that regulates everything we do. Freud believed that the superego constantly comes into conflict with our desires and this conflict is a source of unease. Freudian slips of the tongue demonstrate that our unconscious can interfere in our actions—we often say things that we did not intend to say but that might be what we really mean. He suggested that dreams are a way of fulfilling our wishes. After Freud the unconscious became very important for art and literature. Alberto suggests that they can use the fact that Albert Knag does not know his own unconscious to escape, and he tells Sophie to distract the author while he works on their plan.

## Analysis

Gaarder's decision to have Alberto lecture Sophie about Darwin and Freud—two figures who are undoubtedly tremendously important but who are not always considered philosophers—shows that Gaarder believes that we must all be philosophers. *Sophie's World* tells us that philosophy is the single most central discipline to life. It does not really matter whether someone is a philosopher or a cook by profession, as long as they thought about philosophical questions and had something to say about them. In fact, the person's ideas are really all that

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matters. Whether or not Darwin considered himself a philosopher does not matter, except to give us an idea of what he meant by the term. Because for Gaarder, anyone who thinks about some of the huge questions that have been asked in the book is a philosopher, and anyone who offers a vantage point for looking at those questions that has had a major impact is someone whom Sophie should study.

Gaarder orders the philosophers carefully. The chapter before Darwin is on Marx, who believed that material forces drove history. Darwin's theory suggests that it is the ability to survive that is critical to a species' survival. The Romantics preceded Darwin. Their notion of a world spirit complements Hegel's idea of the dialectic. Then Kierkegaard wanted to return to an individualistic way of viewing things. Darwin's ideas can be viewed as a bridge between these ways of thinking. First of all, he returned man to nature, since we evolved from animals and are subject to the same natural selection that governs the rest of nature. The Romantics would have been pleased by this discovery. At the same time, however, Darwin points out that we do not know how life began and so each one of us is a part of the mystery of life. Thus the individual's role in life is not diminished, something that seems suitable to Kierkegaard. And we have become aware of the process of evolution itself, an idea that would have fit with Hegel's idea of the world spirit becoming conscious of itself. Furthermore, all of his ideas have as their framework the idea that the struggle for survival is the way that nature operates—Marx uses a similar train of thought to understand human life.

Darwin can be viewed as fitting in with the ideas of his time, precisely because he brought them all together in a way that was drastically new and challenging. Every thinker grows up in a certain context, and that context plays a major role in the development of ideas. By laying out the ideas of each thinker so clearly and presenting them in a manner that makes plain the connections between each one, Gaarder allows us to see how large the role of context is for a philosopher. Without disregarding the ingenuity of each individual thinker, it is striking to see how much we are all a product of our time. The ideas that pervade our time period, even though we probably cannot properly identify them while we are in that period, may to a large extent set up the problems that we are going to try to solve and delimit the solutions that we will find to them.

## Our Own Time and The Garden Party

### Summary

#### Our Own Time

Hilde wakes up and realizes that she dreamed that she was sitting on the dock hearing Sophie's voice when her father came home. Then Hilde begins to read again, and she

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follows Sophie as she tries to distract Albert Knag from Alberto. Sophie climbs a tree, gets stuck, and is flown down by a goose that first makes her smaller so she can ride. Sophie gets home and helps her mother prepare for garden party before going to sleep. The next morning, Sophie meets Alberto in town, although he shows up late, claiming he did so on purpose. Then Alberto begins to talk more about existentialism. He focuses on Sartre, who felt that existentialists have nothing but humanity to go on. He was an atheist who believed that because people are conscious of their existence, their "being" is therefore different from that of things. Sartre thought that there is no general human nature but rather that we must create our own. He viewed our freedom as a burden, since we arrive in the world free whether we like it or not. We must assume complete responsibility for our actions and find our own meaning in life through the use of our consciousness. Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre's companion, argued further that male and female natures do not exist.

Alberto then points out that modern science is still dealing with many of the questions that the ancient Greek philosophers asked. And what is special about philosophical questions is that they must always be asked over the years and cannot be answered in any permanent sense. He speaks of new trends and warns Sophie not to pay attention to all of the so-called New Age science that is really just superstition passing as science. Alberto tells her that publishers publish what people want to read, not necessarily good books. He debunks some of the ideas of the supernatural and says that nature itself is magnificent enough. Before Sophie leaves Alberto buys her a copy of *Sophie's World*, which sits on the philosophy shelf in a bookstore

## The Garden Party

Hilde pauses in her reading to think about the way that her father has managed to send so many messages to her in the book. Then she reads on. Sophie bumps into her mother on the bus ride home and her mom reads a bit of *Sophie's World* but does not seem too surprised. They make it through a demonstration on their street and then spend the rest of the day preparing. Joanna helps them set up the next day. The guests begin to arrive, and soon everyone waits for Alberto. Alberto arrives late, sets off a few firecrackers, and sits down after Sophie's mom makes a short speech. Suddenly Joanna begins kissing Jeremy, one of the boys. Soon, Joanna and Jeremy are rolling in the grass together while everyone except Sophie and Alberto watches. Alberto tells everyone the truth about their existence—that they are all merely figments of the imagination of Albert Knag. Things begin to get out of hand, and Alberto and Sophie disappear just as the book comes to a close.

## Analysis

The absurdity of Sophie's party points to the fact that we do not know any truths about life. We do not know what happens after death or whether the world is real. We have no answers

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to the philosophical questions that have been posed in this book. But everyone acts as if they have already been answered. At the party, everyone acts very strangely, and it seems that the only two people acting normally are Sophie and Alberto, who know that everyone else is merely a collection of neurons in the brain of Hilde's father. Even if the world is real and we actually have discovered some of the laws that govern the universe, there are other questions that render our knowledge useless. For example, we will never be able to discover a law that tells us how to live a good life. No one can know what lies beyond the universe. There are a host of things that we will never have any certain knowledge about, and they apply directly to our lives. So in a sense it is our certainty about life that is really absurd. What reasons do we have to act the way we do? Gaarder wants us to take a look at the way we live and to attempt to think out for ourselves how we want to approach life. Most people act the way they do because of their upbringing and the society that they live in. But those are terrible indicators as to how one should live because they can never answer the intensely personal question of meaning. Religion may seem to give people those answers, but Kierkegaard pointed out that everyone must struggle with faith on an individual level. He believed that nothing less than our existence is at stake. Sartre was not religious, and so he felt we have nothing but ourselves to fall back on.

Gaarder seems to wholeheartedly embrace existentialism. Although all of the other philosophy that has been studied has much to offer, it seems clear that one must find meaning within life. Therefore on one level we all must come to terms with the world in our own way. However, although the meaning must be personal, that does not mean that we must be alone. Sophie and Alberto work together throughout the book and community, family, or friends may help to provide that very meaning that we all search for. The critical thing is that we all try to come to some sort of understanding. It will not be easy, because Alberto and Sophie show us that life does not come with a meaning attached to it. Their existence was solely to please Hilde, but they attempted to get something else out of life. In the same way, even if we all exist only as an experiment by a higher being, we must still attempt to get what we can out of life. But we must not make the mistake of living our lives according to a set of values that turn out not to really hold any meaning. That would be a true tragedy. Alberto does not want Sophie to live that way, Albert Knag does not want Hilde to live that way, and clearly Gaarder does not want us to live that way. Nothing could be worse than realizing at the end of one's life that everything, all the actions and events, were meaningless. And if we accept some gift-wrapped societal meaning that may be exactly what happens in the end. If we do not grapple with the issues and the questions that cannot be answered then we will not find meaning.

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## Counterpoint and The Big Bang

### Summary

#### Counterpoint

Hilde cannot figure out what happened to Sophie and Alberto and she thinks she must read the book a few more times to find some clues. Sophie and Alberto escape from Albert Knag and find themselves in Oslo. Alberto assures Sophie that they are outside of Hilde's father's reach, but points out that he may have wanted them to escape because he created the chaos that let them slip away. Sophie figures out that people cannot hear them, and Alberto points out that even though they are no longer a part of the major's book they are also not like other people. They take a make-believe car and drive off to be there when Albert Knag meets his daughter in Lillesand.

Albert Knag lands in the Copenhagen airport and is immediately paged. He is given a letter, from his daughter, which gives him some instructions. Then as he passes a deli he sees another envelope with his name on it that tells him what to buy in the store. Albert Knag thinks he is being observed and he spends the rest of his wait in the airport following instructions from letters and is quite paranoid on his plane ride home.

Sophie and Alberto are driving, but Sophie is concerned because they can go right through everything and she thinks they are less real than everything around them. Alberto says the opposite is true—they can go through everything else because they are more solid than the rest. They are spirit, and spirit can move through anything. They stop for coffee and meet an old woman who is also of spirit, out of Grimm's Fairy Tales. She tells them they are part of the invisible people and they see many others whom they had once thought were imaginary.

Albert Knag realizes his daughter has given him a dose of his own medicine and it continues the entire trip home. Hilde has messages to him everywhere. Finally he arrives at home. Just at that moment Sophie and Alberto arrive and Sophie runs down to Hilde. She tries to speak to her, knowing she cannot succeed, but is surprised to see that Hilde seems to sense something. Then her father calls her name. Hilde and her father talk about everything, laughing and enjoying themselves, and Hilde again thinks she hears something. What she heard was Alberto honking the car horn. Sophie is sad that she cannot live a real life but Alberto points out that they will live forever and that there is much for them to do.

#### The Big Bang

While Hilde's father tells her about the universe and the Big Bang, Sophie tells Alberto she thinks they can have an effect in Hilde's world. She hits Hilde in the face with a wrench and

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Hilde yelps in pain, thinking a gadfly stung her. Hilde thinks she feels Sophie's presence. Alberto is impressed. Albert tells his daughter that we are all a part of the same whole, since everything started with the Big Bang. So an attempt to understand the universe is an attempt to understand ourselves. Sophie and Alberto manage to get the rowboat loose, and Albert makes fun of his daughter by suggesting that maybe Sophie did it.

## Analysis

The question of free will is one that philosophers have been addressing for ages. It is also one of the main issues throughout *Sophie's World*. The question that can always be asked of our actions—are they determined—is exactly what we must ask of Sophie and Alberto. Their case makes the argument very explicit. We know that Albert Knag has written the book in which they are characters. They know that as well, but they do not know how the book will end. Sophie and Alberto feel as though they are in control of their actions even though they know that Albert Knag has made them feel that way. The same problem applies to our lives. While it is not as obvious as it appears for the characters in the book, all of our actions could also be predetermined. The fact that, unlike Sophie, we do not know that they are determined, does not change the situation. Many of the philosophers that Sophie and Alberto have studied dealt with this issue. Some of them felt that everything is determined, that we are all subject to the laws of nature and our every action and thought follow from them. Others believe that with consciousness comes our freedom. The problem is that if things are determined and we do not have free will then even our debates about the subject are fated to happen. What we feel about what is happening does not matter, because we cannot change what will occur. Such a thought is depressing, but it does not seem that Gaarder thinks along those lines.

Gaarder argues that there is more to life and existence than we can possibly understand. The point is not that Sophie and Alberto really exist somewhere but simply that if they did, we would never know it. Alberto and Sophie escape from Hilde's father. He created them, and they existed only for his daughter's amusement, but they took on an existence of their own. This returns us again to Socrates and the idea that knowing that we know nothing is the first step towards wisdom. Gaarder might be saying that we really know very little about life, and that we must always keep that in mind. Maybe we are free; maybe our every thought is determined. Either way we really have no way of knowing. What is critical is that we always raise the question. If we continually bear in mind the possibilities, then we will live our lives properly. We must make do with our ignorance and go on from there. One of the largest points of Gaarder's book is that meaning cannot be found in books. People must find meaning in their lives through living, and through asking the questions that pervade *Sophie's World*. Just because we are ignorant does not mean it is all right to live our lives without questioning. The opposite is true. Precisely because there are questions that we cannot definitively answer we must continue asking them—and that is what makes for a fulfilling life.

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## IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS EXPLAINED

1. *But when these basic needs have been satisfied—will there still be something that everybody needs? Philosophers think so. They believe that man cannot live by bread alone. Of course everyone needs food. And everyone needs love and care. But there is something else—apart from that—which everyone needs, and that is to figure out who we are and why we are here.*

In Alberto's introductory letter to Sophie, he tells her what the aim of philosophy is and why it is central to our lives. Throughout the book, Gaarder repeatedly addresses the importance of philosophy and its relevance to our everyday lives. This is where Alberto first states that idea. Basically, once we have satisfied our basic needs we have further needs that must be met—the needs of our mind. We are thinking creatures, and we can ponder the universe, and if we do not do so, it is a tragedy. It is not simply good for us to ask important philosophical questions; rather, it is necessary for us to do so because otherwise our lives to a large extent will have been in vain. The only way that we can find meaning in life is through philosophizing, and it is important to have meaning. Some who do not philosophize may think that they have found meaning but in reality they have simply accepted meaning handed down to them from someone or some tradition. But these are things that each person must work out, and that is why it is so critical that we all engage in philosophical thinking.

2. *Basically there are not many philosophical questions to ask. We have already asked some of the most important ones. But history presents us with many different answers to each question. So it is easier to ask philosophical questions than to answer them.*

In the first letter that Alberto sends to Sophie, he explains that philosophy is very simple. There are not all that many philosophical questions for us to ask. The point, then, is not simply asking the questions but rather coming up with some sort of a solution for them. And that solution will not be easy. People have been trying to answer some of the questions for thousands of years and we can take into consideration what they already said, but in the end the answer must satisfy us personally. Also the role of historical context becomes important. Freedom in ancient Athens meant something different from what it means now simply because slavery was an accepted part of life back then. There are aspects of every historical period that by current standards are judged wrong, and this means that we too will someday be looked upon as unjust or immoral in certain ways. Philosophy moves with human history.

3. *A philosopher knows that in reality he knows very little. That is why he constantly strives to achieve true insight. Socrates was one of these rare people. He knew that he knew nothing*

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*about life and the world. And now comes the important part: it troubled him that he knew so little.*

One of the most important philosophical truths is the one that Socrates was famous for. Alberto tells Sophie about it early on in their correspondence. Socrates started from the fact that he knew nothing. Descartes likewise built up the first great modern system by systematically doubting all of his knowledge. In both cases there is a striking conclusion. Socrates does know something, and that is that he knows nothing. The statement is paradoxical, but also very powerful. It allowed him to use his ignorance as a tool. If one knows nothing then one can ask questions about anything. Not knowing anything is the first step on the path to philosophical wisdom, and Gaarder continually warns us against assuming knowledge of anything. Descartes doubted everything, and finally the one thing he knew was that he doubted. From that doubt he went on to create a grand philosophy. The point is that in order to actually learn something it is better to strip ourselves of what we think we know or what others have told us. Certain knowledge of our ignorance is preferable to uncertain knowledge. Above all else, Gaarder wants us to think about what we know and believe.

4. *"According to Berkeley, my own soul can be the cause of my own ideas—just as when I dream—but only another will or spirit can be the cause of the ideas that make up the 'corporeal' world. Everything is due to that spirit which is the cause of 'everything in everything' and which 'all things consist in,' he said."*

A little more than halfway through the story Alberto explains to Sophie about Berkeley's philosophy. Berkeley's idea is not necessarily any more enthralling or brilliant than any of the other philosophers who are discussed in the book. However, it just so happens that Berkeley is right in the case of Alberto and Sophie. They exist in the mind of Albert Knag, who created them in order to give his daughter a spectacular birthday gift. The point is not so much that Berkeley was right but rather a magnificent demonstration of just how relevant philosophy can be to our everyday lives. We must not only be philosophers, but we must also study philosophy, because it is possible that a previous thinker came up with a solution to something that is important to us. Furthermore, even if we do not get an answer from the thinkers of the past, seeing other ideas is a great way to stimulate new ones.

5. *"However, we must not exaggerate the importance of these figures. It is enough just to hold a stone in your hand. The universe would have been equally incomprehensible if it had only consisted of that one stone the size of an orange. The question would be just as impenetrable: where did this stone come from?"*

At the very end of the book, Albert Knag sits with Hilde and discusses the universe with her. After he describes the Big Bang and points out that we are united in a spectacular way—each one of us stems from that infinitesimally small point that exploded forth and formed the

universe—he says that the contents of the universe itself are relatively unimportant. The philosophical question remains the same either way. If the universe were simply a small rock we would still be forced to ask where it came from. Thus the end of the book returns to the beginning. The first questions that Alberto sent to Sophie were "who are you?" and "where does the world come from?" and the book ends pondering the same issues.

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**KEY FACTS****FULL TITLE**

*Sophie's World: A Novel About the History of Philosophy*

**AUTHOR**

Jostein Gaarder

**TYPE OF WORK**

Novel

**GENRE**

Fantasy/philosophical history

**LANGUAGE**

Norwegian

**DATE OF FIRST PUBLICATION**

1991

**PUBLISHER**

H. Aschehoug & Co.

**NARRATOR**

Omniscient narrator

**CLIMAX**

Sophie and Alberto disappear from the party.

**PROTAGONIST**

Sophie

**ANTAGONIST**

Albert Knag

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**SETTING (TIME)**

The 1990s

**SETTING (PLACE)**

Norway

**POINT OF VIEW**

Sophie is the primary narrator. Beginning with the chapter "Bjerkley," point of view switches between Sophie and Hilde. For a few pages the story is told from Albert Knag's point of view.

**FALLING ACTION**

Hilde gives Albert Knag a dose of his own medicine while Alberto and Sophie explore their new lives as spirit.

**TENSE**

Immediate past

**FORESHADOWING**

Alberto hints several times about Hilde's father's power, the importance of Berkeley, and the possibility that they might escape. Dreams in the book often foreshadow events that will occur later.

**TOPE**

The tone is playfully inquisitive.

**THEMES**

Philosophy; free will

**MOTIFS**

Books; dreams

**SYMBOLS**

Alberto as teacher; Hilde as reader; Sophie as student

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**STUDY QUESTIONS AND ESSAY TOPICS****Study Questions***1. Compare and contrast Sophie and Hilde.*

There is a great deal of similarity between Sophie and Hilde. Both of them enjoy thinking and like to wonder about life and the unknown. Both girls are angered by the opinions of many of the philosophers about women. Sophie loses interest in school while she is taking the philosophy course and Hilde skips school on her birthday to read the book. Both girls are fairly practical and have a good deal of self-confidence. However, there are some differences between them as well. Hilde has a better relationship with her parents. Sophie and her mother get along but it is really Alberto who understands her mind in the way that Albert Knag understands his daughter. Although Hilde thinks that Sophie may exist, she is not as radical a thinker as Sophie. There is good reason for this difference, however, since Hilde did not recently free herself from the mind of the person who created her. And while Hilde looks to get revenge on her father for Sophie, it is interesting to note that Sophie herself does not want revenge. She is not really angry with Hilde's father; she just wants to be free of his control.

*2. Take two philosophers from different time periods and discuss the ways in which their historical context played a role in their philosophy.*

Kant was concerned with the way we perceive the world. He inherited a host of questions from the debate between the empiricists and the rationalists, and he made an attempt to come up with a solution to that debate. His solution was undoubtedly brilliant, and his philosophy encompasses many facets of human life. However, Kant still poses universal rules—he believes that all human beings know the difference between right and wrong. Kierkegaard, on the other hand was reacting against the Romantic tradition and Hegel. He was angered by the emphasis on community and the world spirit and wanted to return the focus to the individual. Kierkegaard is not interested in the sorts of grander claims about morality that Kant made because he feels that each person must live on their own and must find their own truth in life. He was looking for subjective truths and felt that reason was not important because it could not help us with the really difficult things in life. For Kierkegaard, it was not possible to treat people as a unified whole—each person is a unique individual who must make their own choices. Although he was reacting against the Romantics, it is certain that some of their emphasis on the creative powers of the individual influenced his development of existentialism. There is more to be said about both Kant and Kierkegaard, but the idea is

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to look at the context of their lives and attempt to compare the ways that their philosophies might have been influenced.

3. *"She decided that philosophy was not something you can learn; but perhaps you can learn to think philosophically." Sophie thinks this at the end of the chapter on the natural philosophers. Do you agree with the above statement? Why or why not?*

Thinking philosophically involves questioning. To be a philosopher one must think about things and ask good questions. Then one must try to think up some sort of an explanation for the questions that have been asked. So learning to think philosophically is how to be a philosopher. But at the same time, the best way to learn how to think philosophically may be to look at examples from the history of thought. And when one studies the problems that other philosophers faced and the solutions that they came up with, then that is learning philosophy. It may be that as babies we act like philosophers because we constantly wonder about things, but philosophers go a step further and try to come up with an explanation for the wondrous thing. And it may be that thinking philosophically is a technique that we need to be trained in. In that case learning philosophy through examples will cultivate our ability to think philosophically and therefore allow us to be philosophers.

## Suggested Essay Topics

4. *Who is the hero of Sophie's World? Defend your selection against at least two other possible characters.*

5. *Which of the philosophical questions raised in the book is the most compelling? What makes it more interesting or crucial than the others?*

6. *What is the role of Mrs. Amundsen in Sophie's World?*

7. *Take any of the philosophers from the book and describe how their philosophy is personally relevant.*

8. *What is the role of irony in Sophie's World? Refer to both Socratic irony and romantic irony.*

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**REVIEW AND RESOURCES****Quiz**

1. *Who was Plato's teacher?*

FALSE Heraclitus /FALSE

FALSE Aristotle /FALSE

TRUE Socrates /TRUE

FALSE Democritus /FALSE

2. *Who was Aristotle's teacher?*

FALSE Parmenides /FALSE

FALSE Socrates /FALSE

FALSE Anaxagoras /FALSE

TRUE Plato /TRUE

3. *Who founded existentialism?*

TRUE Kierkegaard /TRUE

FALSE Sartre /FALSE

FALSE Freud /FALSE

FALSE Darwin /FALSE

4. *Who is Hilde's father?*

FALSE Alberto /FALSE

FALSE Hermes /FALSE

FALSE Jeremy /FALSE

TRUE Albert /TRUE

5. *Who considered freedom a burden?*

FALSE Aquinas /FALSE

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TRUE Sartre /TRUE

FALSE Augustine /FALSE

FALSE Alberto /FALSE

*6. Where was Hilde's father stationed?*

FALSE Israel /FALSE

FALSE Saudi Arabia /FALSE

FALSE Iraq /FALSE

TRUE Lebanon /TRUE

*7. Who does Hilde's father work for?*

FALSE The Norwegian government /FALSE

TRUE The United Nations /TRUE

FALSE The Central Intelligence Agency /FALSE

FALSE Greenpeace /FALSE

*8. What is Alberto's dog's name?*

FALSE Thor /FALSE

FALSE Beauvoir /FALSE

FALSE Aristotle /FALSE

TRUE Hermes /TRUE

*9. Where is Alberto in the videotape he gives to Sophie?*

TRUE Athens /TRUE

FALSE Paris /FALSE

FALSE Rome /FALSE

FALSE Oslo /FALSE

*10. Who believed in a world of ideas?*

FALSE Kant /FALSE

FALSE Hume /FALSE

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TRUE Plato /TRUE

FALSE Kierkegaard /FALSE

11. *Who believed it is possible that we exist only in God's mind?*

FALSE Descartes /FALSE

FALSE Aristotle /FALSE

FALSE Newton /FALSE

TRUE Berkeley /TRUE

12. *Who believed the world conforms to our mind?*

TRUE Kant /TRUE

FALSE Aquinas /FALSE

FALSE Plato /FALSE

FALSE Descartes /FALSE

13. *When did the idea of returning to nature become popular?*

FALSE The Middle Ages /FALSE

FALSE The Baroque /FALSE

FALSE The Renaissance /FALSE

TRUE The Enlightenment /TRUE

14. *Who is famous for doubting?*

FALSE Locke /FALSE

FALSE Hume /FALSE

TRUE Descartes /TRUE

FALSE Spinoza /FALSE

15. *Who felt that philosophy needed to be practical?*

TRUE Marx /TRUE

FALSE Darwin /FALSE

FALSE Aquinas /FALSE

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FALSE Plato /FALSE

16. *Who believed that people act according to their feelings, not their reason?*

FALSE Kant /FALSE

FALSE Aristotle /FALSE

TRUE Hume /TRUE

FALSE Sartre /FALSE

17. *What is the name of Sophie's best friend?*

FALSE Hannah /FALSE

TRUE Joanna /TRUE

FALSE Hilde /FALSE

FALSE Albert /FALSE

18. *Who argues that religion is a matter of either believing or not?*

TRUE Kierkegaard /TRUE

FALSE Locke /FALSE

FALSE Hume /FALSE

FALSE Sartre /FALSE

19. *Who developed the theory of natural selection?*

FALSE Freud /FALSE

FALSE Marx /FALSE

FALSE Aquinas /FALSE

TRUE Darwin /TRUE

20. *What period was characterized by an emphasis on humanism?*

FALSE The Baroque /FALSE

FALSE The Enlightenment /FALSE

TRUE The Renaissance /TRUE

FALSE The Middle Ages /FALSE

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21. *Who focused on the world spirit?*

FALSE Marx /FALSE

FALSE Darwin /FALSE

FALSE Freud /FALSE

TRUE Hegel /TRUE

22. *Where did Socrates live?*

FALSE Sparta /FALSE

FALSE Rome /FALSE

TRUE Athens /TRUE

FALSE Crete /FALSE

23. *Who believed material forces shape history?*

FALSE Sartre /FALSE

TRUE Marx /TRUE

FALSE Kierkegaard /FALSE

FALSE Kant /FALSE

24. *Who "Christianized" Aristotle?*

TRUE Aquinas /TRUE

FALSE Augustine /FALSE

FALSE Locke /FALSE

FALSE Hume /FALSE

25. *Where does the book take place?*

FALSE America /FALSE

FALSE Greece /FALSE

FALSE Switzerland /FALSE

TRUE Norway /TRUE

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## Suggestions for Further Reading

Gaarder, Jostein. *The Solitaire Mystery*. Translated by Sarah Jane Hails. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996.

Gaarder, Jostein. *The Christmas Mystery*. Translated by Elizabeth Rohean. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996.

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Gaarder, Jostein. *Through A Glass, Darkly*. Translated by Elizabeth Rohean. London: Phoenix, 1998.

Gaarder, Jostein. *That Same Flower: Flavia Aemilia's Letter to St. Augustine*. Translated by Ann Born. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998.